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Berkhamstead

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF WILLIAM COWPER.

VOL. I.

D. Harding. Engraved by E. Finden.

The House in which Cowper was born.

BERKHAMSTEAD.

"'Tis now become a history little known,
That once we call'd the Pastoral house our own."

LONDON. SAUNDERS & OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET.

THE WORKS

OF

WILLIAM COWPER

HIS

LIFE AND LETTERS

BY WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

NOW FIRST COMPLETED BY THE INTRODUCTION OF

COWPER'S PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE.

EDITED BY

THE REV. T. S. GRIMSHAWE, A.M.

RECTOR OF BURTON, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, AND VICAR OF HIDDENHAM, BEDFORDSHIRE, AUTHOR OF THE LIFE OF THE REV. LEGH RICHMOND.

Letters, such as are written from wise men, are, of all the words of men, in my judgment the best.

LORD BACON.

VOL. I.

LONDON

SAUNDERS AND OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET.

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ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

The flattering reception with which the present work has been honoured, attested by the sale of more than Twenty Thousand volumes, in the course of the first year of its publication, has induced the Editor to embody such further improvements in the present Edition, as time and reflection have suggested. Some Notes also will be found to be appended to the close of each volume, which will thus illustrate the text without interfering with the narrative. His great object throughout has been to vindicate the religious views of Cowper from the imputed charge of originating his malady, a position which he conceives to be wholly untenable, and in opposition to the most express evidence, and the recorded testimony of Cowper's own "Memoir." He trusts this object has been success-

fully accomplished. It is high time to dissipate the illusions of party prejudice, and to rescue Cowper from biassed and erroneous representations. His further aim has been to write in unison with the sweet and kindred spirit of Cowper; to exclude whatever is not in harmony with that feeling; and to subserve the cause of true religion. Such has been the humble design of the Editor, however he may regret that the execution falls short of so just and important an undertaking.

Biddenham, Jan. 21*st*, 1836.

DEDICATION.

TO THE DOWAGER LADY THROCKMORTON.

Your Ladyship's peculiar intimacy with the poet Cowper, and your former residence at Weston, where every object is embellished by his muse, and clothed with a species of poetical verdure, give you a just title to have your name associated with his endeared memory.

But, independently of these considerations, you are recorded both in his poetry and prose, and have thus acquired a kind of double immortality. These reasons are sufficiently valid to

authorize the present dedication. But there are additional motives,—the recollection of the happy hours, formerly spent at Weston, in your society and in that of Sir George Throckmorton, enhanced by the presence of our common lamented friend, Dr. Johnson. A dispensation which spares neither rank, accomplishments, nor virtues, has unhappily terminated this enjoyment, but it has not extinguished those sentiments of esteem and regard, with which

I have the honor to be,

My dear Lady Throckmorton,

Your very sincere and obliged friend,

T. S. GRIMSHAWE.

Biddenham, Feb. 28, 1835.

PREFACE.

In presenting to the public this new and complete edition of the Life, Correspondence, and Poems of Cowper, it may be proper for me to state the grounds on which it claims to be the only complete edition that has been, or can be published.

After the decease of this justly admired author, Hayley received from my lamented brother-in-law, Dr. Johnson, (so endeared by his exemplary attention to his afflicted relative,) every facility for his intended biography. Aided also by valuable contributions from other quarters, he was thus furnished with rich materials for the execution of his interesting work. The reception with which his Life of Cowper was honoured, and the successive editions through which it passed,

afforded unequivocal testimony to the industry and talents of the biographer and to the epistolary merits of the Poet. Still there were many, intimately acquainted with the character and principles of Cowper, who considered that, on the whole, a very erroneous impression was conveyed to the public. On this subject no one was perhaps more competent to form a just estimate than the late Dr. Johnson. A long and familiar intercourse with his endeared relative had afforded him all the advantages of a daily and minute observation. His possession of documents, and intimate knowledge of facts, enabled him to discover the partial suppression of some letters, and the total omission of others, that, in his judgment, were essential to the developement of Cowper's real character. The cause of this procedure may be explained so as fully to exonerate Hayley from any charge injurious to his honour. His mind, however literary and elegant, was not precisely qualified to present a religious character to the view of the British public, without committing some important errors. Hence, in occasional parts of his work, his reflections are misplaced, sometimes injurious, and often injudicious; and in no portion of it is this defect more visible than

where he attributes the malady of Cowper to the operation of religious causes.

It would be difficult to express the painful feeling produced by these facts on the minds of Dr. Johnson and of his friends. Hayley indeed seems to be afraid of exhibiting Cowper too much *in a religious garb*, lest he should either lessen his estimation, alarm the reader, or compromise himself. To these circumstances may be attributed the defects that we have noticed, and which have rendered his otherwise excellent production an imperfect work. The consequence, as regards Cowper, has been unfortunate. "People," observes Dr. Johnson, "read the Letters with 'the Task' in their recollection, (and *vice versâ*,) and are perplexed. They look for the Cowper of each in the other, and find him not; the correspondency is destroyed. The character of Cowper is thus undetermined; mystery hangs over it, and the opinions formed of him are as various as the minds of the inquirers." It was to dissipate this illusion, that my lamented friend collected the "Private Correspondence," containing letters that had been previously suppressed, with the addition of others, then brought to light for the first time. Still there remains one

more important object to be accomplished: viz., to present to the British public the *whole Correspondence in its entire and unbroken form, and in its chronological order.* Then, and not till *then*, will the real character of Cowper be fully understood and comprehended; and the consistency of his Christian character be found to harmonize with the Christian spirit of his pure and exalted productions.

Supplemental to such an undertaking is the task of revising Hayley's Life of the Poet, purifying it from the errors that detract from its acknowledged value, and adapting it to the demands and expectations of the religious public. That this desideratum has been long felt, to an extent far beyond what is commonly supposed, the Editor has had ample means of knowing, from his own personal observation, and from repeated assurances of the same import from his lamented friend, the Rev. Legh Richmond.*

The time for carrying this object into effect is now arrived. The termination of the copyright of Hayley's Life of Cowper, and access to the Private Correspondence collected by Dr. John-

* Of the letters contained in the "Private Correspondence" he emphatically remarked, "Cowper will never be clearly and satisfactorily understood without them."

son, enable the Editor to combine all these objects, and to present, for the first time, a *Complete Edition of the Works of Cowper*, which it is not in the power of any individual besides himself to accomplish, because all others are debarred access to the Private Correspondence. Upwards of two hundred letters will be thus incorporated with the former work of Hayley, in their due and chronological order.

The merits of "The Private Correspondence" are thus attested in a letter addressed to Dr. Johnson, by a no less distinguished judge than the late Rev. Robert Hall.—"It is quite unnecessary to say that I perused the letters with great admiration and delight. I have always considered the letters of Mr. Cowper as the finest specimen of the epistolary style in our language; and *these* appear to me of a superior description to the former, possessing as much beauty, with more piety and pathos. To an air of inimitable ease and carelessness they unite a high degree of correctness, such as could result only from the clearest intellect, combined with the most finished taste. I have scarcely found a single word which is capable of being exchanged for a better. Literary errors I can discern none. The selection of words, and the construction of periods,

are inimitable; they present as striking a contrast as can well be conceived to the turgid verbosity which passes at present for fine writing, and which bears a great resemblance to the degeneracy which marks the style of Ammianus Marcellinus, as compared to that of Cicero or of Livy. In my humble opinion, the study of Cowper's prose may on this account be as useful in forming the taste of young people as his poetry. That the Letters will afford great delight to all persons of true taste, and that you will confer a most acceptable present on the reading world by publishing them, will not admit of a doubt."

All that now remains is for the Editor to say one word respecting himself. He has been called upon to engage in this undertaking both on public and private grounds. He is not insensible to the honour of such a commission, and yet feels that he is undertaking a delicate and responsible office. May he execute it in humble dependence on the Divine blessing, and in a spirit that accords with the venerated name of Cowper! Had the life of his endeared friend, Dr. Johnson, been prolonged, no man would have been better qualified for such an office. His ample sources of information, his name,

and his profound veneration for the memory of Cowper, (whom he tenderly watched while living, and whose eyes he closed in death,) would have awakened an interest to which no other writer could presume to lay claim. It is under the failure of this expectation, which is extinguished by the grave, that the Editor feels himself called upon to endeavour to supply the void: and thus to fulfil what is due to the character of Cowper, and to the known wishes of his departed friend. Peace be to his ashes! They now rest near those of his beloved Bard, while their happy spirits are reunited in a world, where no cloud obscures the mind, and no sorrow depresses the heart: and where the mysterious dispensations of Providence will be found to have been in accordance with his unerring wisdom and mercy.

*** It is impossible for the Editor to specify the various instances of revision in the narrative of Hayley, because they are sometimes minute or

verbal, at other times more enlarged. The object has been to retain the basis of his work, as far as possible. The introduction of new matter is principally where the interests of religion, or a regard to Cowper's character seemed to require it; and for such remarks the Editor is solely responsible.

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THE

LIFE OF COWPER.

Part the First.

THE family of COWPER appears to have held, for several centuries, a respectable rank among the merchants and gentry of England. We learn from the life of the first Earl Cowper, in the Biographia Britannica, that his ancestors were inhabitants of Sussex, in the reign of Edward the Fourth. The name is found repeatedly among the sheriffs of London, and William Cowper, who resided as a country gentleman in Kent, was created a baronet by King Charles the First, in 1641.* But the family rose to higher distinction in the beginning of the last century, by the remarkable circumstance of producing two brothers, who both ob-

* This gentleman was a writer of English verse, and, with rare munificence, bestowed both an epitaph and a monument on that illustrious divine, the venerable Hooker. In the edition of Walton's Lives, by Zouch, the curious reader may find the epitaph written by Sir William Cowper.

tained a seat in the House of Peers by their eminence in the profession of the law. William, the elder, became Lord High Chancellor in 1707. Spencer Cowper, the younger, was appointed Chief Justice of Chester in 1717, and afterwards a Judge in the Court of Common Pleas, being permitted by the particular favour of the king to hold those two offices to the end of his life. He died in Lincoln's Inn, on the 10th of December 1728, and has the higher claim to our notice as the immediate ancestor of the poet. By his first wife, Judith Pennington (whose exemplary character is still revered by her descendants) Judge Cowper left several children; among them a daughter, Judith, who at the age of eighteen discovered a striking talent for poetry, in the praise of her cotemporary poets Pope and Hughes. This lady, the wife of Colonel Madan, transmitted her own poetical and devout spirit to her daughter Frances Maria, who was married to her cousin Major Cowper; the amiable character of Maria will unfold itself in the course of this work, as the friend and correspondent of her more eminent relation, the second grandchild of the Judge, destined to honour the name of Cowper, by displaying with peculiar purity and fervour, the double enthusiasm of poetry and devotion. The father of the subject of the following pages was John Cowper, the Judge's second son, who took his degrees in divinity, was chaplain to King George the Second, and resided at his Rectory of Great Berkhamstead, in Hertfordshire, the scene of the poet's infancy, which he has thus com-

memorated in a singularly beautiful and pathetic composition on the portrait of his mother.

Where once we dwelt our name is heard no more,
Children not thine have trod my nursery floor,
And where the gard'ner Robin, day by day,
Drew me to school along the public way,
Delighted with my bauble coach, and wrapt
In scarlet mantle warm, and velvet-capt,
'Tis now become a history little known,
That once we call'd the past'ral house our own.
Short-liv'd possession! but the record fair
That memory keeps of all thy kindness there,
Still outlives many a storm, that has effac'd
A thousand other themes less deeply traced.
Thy nightly visits to my chamber made,
That thou might'st know me safe and warmly laid,
Thy morning bounties ere I left my home,
The biscuit or confectionary plum;
The fragrant waters on my cheeks bestowed
By thy own hand, till fresh they shone and glow'd;
All this, and more endearing still than all,
Thy constant flow of love, that knew no fall;
Ne'er roughen'd by those cataracts and breaks,
That humour interpos'd too often makes;
All this, still legible in memory's page,
And still to be so to my latest age,
Adds joy to duty, makes me glad to pay
Such honours to thee as my numbers may.

The parent, whose merits are so feelingly recorded by the filial tenderness of the poet, was Ann, daughter of Roger Donne, esq., of Ludham Hall, in Norfolk. This lady, whose family is said to have been originally from Wales, was married in the bloom of youth to Dr. Cowper: after giving

birth to several children, who died in their infancy, and leaving two sons, William, the immediate subject of this memorial, born at Berkhamstead on the 26th of November, 1731, and John, (whose accomplishments and pious death will be described in the course of this compilation,) she died in childbed, at the early age of thirty-four, in 1737. Those who delight in contemplating the best affections of our nature will ever admire the tender sensibility with which the poet has acknowledged his obligations to this amiable mother, in a poem composed more than fifty years after her decease. Readers of this description may find a pleasure in observing how the praise so liberally bestowed on this tender parent, at so late a period, is confirmed (if praise so unquestionable may be said to receive confirmation) by another poetical record of her merit, which the hand of affinity and affection bestowed upon her tomb—a record written at a time when the poet, who was destined to prove, in his advanced life, her most powerful eulogist, had hardly begun to shew the dawn of that genius which, after many years of silent affliction, rose like a star emerging from tempestuous darkness.

The monument of Mrs. Cowper, erected by her husband in the chancel of St. Peter's church at Berkhamstead, contains the following verses, composed by a young lady, her niece, the late Lady Walsingham.

> Here lies, in early years bereft of life,
> The best of mothers, and the kindest wife.

Who neither knew nor practis'd any art,
Secure in all she wish'd, her husband's heart,
Her love to him, still prevalent in death,
Pray'd Heav'n to bless him with her latest breath
Still was she studious never to offend,
And glad of an occasion to commend:
With ease would pardon injuries receiv'd,
Nor e'er was cheerful when another griev'd;
Despising state, with her own lot content,
Enjoy'd the comforts of a life well spent;
Resign'd, when Heaven demanded back her breath,
Her mind heroic 'midst the pangs of death.
Whoe'er thou art that dost this tomb draw near,
O stay awhile, and shed a friendly tear;
These lines, tho' weak, are as herself sincere.

The truth and tenderness of this epitaph will more than compensate with every candid reader the imperfection ascribed to it by its young and modest author. To have lost a parent of a character so virtuous and endearing, at an early period of his childhood, was the prime misfortune of Cowper, and what contributed perhaps in the highest degree to the dark colouring of his subsequent life. The influence of a good mother on the first years of her children, whether nature has given them peculiar strength or peculiar delicacy of frame, is equally inestimable. It is the prerogative and the felicity of such a mother to temper the arrogance of the strong, and to dissipate the timidity of the tender. The infancy of Cowper was delicate in no common degree, and his constitution discovered at a very early season that morbid tendency to diffidence, to melancholy and despair, which darkened as he ad-

vanced in years into periodical fits of the most deplorable depression.

The period having arrived for commencing his education, he was sent to a reputable school at Market-street, in Bedfordshire, under the care of Dr. Pitman, and it is probable that he was removed from it in consequence of an ocular complaint. From a circumstance which he relates of himself at that period, in a letter written in 1792, he seems to have been in danger of resembling Milton in the misfortune of blindness, as he resembled him, more happily, in the fervency of a devout and poetical spirit.

"I have been all my life," says Cowper, "subject to inflammations of the eye, and in my boyish days had specks on both, that threatened to cover them. My father, alarmed for the consequences, sent me to a female oculist of great renown at that time, in whose house I abode two years, but to no good purpose. From her I went to Westminster school, where, at the age of fourteen, the small-pox seized me, and proved the better oculist of the two, for it delivered me from them all: not however from great liableness to inflammation, to which I am in a degree still subject, though much less than formerly, since I have been constant in the use of a hot foot-bath every night, the last thing before going to rest."

It appears a strange process in education, to send a tender child, from a long residence in the house of a female oculist, immediately into all the hardships attendant on a public school. But the

mother of Cowper was dead, and fathers, however excellent, are, in general, utterly incompetent to the management of their young and tender offspring. The little Cowper was sent to his first school in the year of his mother's death, and how ill-suited the scene was to his peculiar character is evident from the description of his sensations in that season of life, which is often, very erroneously, extolled as the happiest period of human existence. He has been frequently heard to lament the persecution he suffered in his childish years, from the cruelty of his school-fellows, in the two scenes of his education. His own forcible expressions represented him at Westminster as not daring to raise his eye above the shoe-buckle of the elder boys, who were too apt to tyrannize over his gentle spirit. The acuteness of his feelings in his childhood, rendered those important years (which might have produced, under tender cultivation, a series of lively enjoyments) mournful periods of increasing timidity and depression. In the most cheerful hours of his advanced life, he could never advert to this season without shuddering at the recollection of its wretchedness. Yet to this perhaps the world is indebted for the pathetic and moral eloquence of those forcible admonitions to parents, which give interest and beauty to his admirable poem on public schools. Poets may be said to realize, in some measure, the poetical idea of the nightingale's singing with a thorn at her breast, as their most exquisite songs have often originated in the acuteness of their personal sufferings. Of this obvious

truth, the poem just mentioned is a very memorable example, and, if any readers have thought the poet too severe in his strictures on that system of education, to which we owe some of the most accomplished characters that ever gave celebrity to a civilized nation, such readers will be candidly reconciled to that moral severity of reproof, in recollecting that it flowed from severe personal experience, united to the purest spirit of philanthropy and patriotism.

The relative merits of public and private education is a question that has long agitated the world. Each has its partizans, its advantages, and defects; and, like all general principles, its application must greatly depend on the circumstances of rank, future destination, and the peculiarities of character and temper. For the full developement of the powers and faculties of the mind—for the acquisition of the various qualifications that fit men to sustain with brilliancy and distinction the duties of active life, whether in the cabinet, the senate, or the forum—for scenes of busy enterprize, where knowledge of the world and the growth of manly spirit seem indispensable; in all such cases, we are disposed to believe, that the palm must be assigned to public education.

But, on the other hand, if we reflect that brilliancy is oftentimes a flame which consumes its object, that knowledge of the world is, for the most part, but a knowledge of the evil that is in the world; and that early habits of extravagance and vice, which are ruinous in their results, are not

unfrequently contracted at public schools; if to these facts we add that man is a candidate for immortality, and that "life" (as Sir William Temple observes) "is but the parenthesis of eternity," it then becomes a question of solemn import, whether integrity and principle do not find a soil more congenial for their growth in the shade and retirement of private education? The one is an advancement for time, the other for eternity. The former affords facilities for making men great, but often at the expense of happiness and conscience. The latter diminishes the temptations to vice, and, while it affords a field for useful and honourable exertion, augments the means of being wise and holy.

We leave the reader to decide the great problem for himself. That he may be enabled to form a right estimate, we would urge him to suffer time and eternity to pass in solemn and deliberate review before him.

That the public school was a scene by no means adapted to the sensitive mind of Cowper is evident. Nor can we avoid cherishing the apprehension that his spirit, naturally morbid, experienced a fatal inroad from that period. He nevertheless acquired the reputation of scholarship, with the advantage of being known and esteemed by some of the aspiring characters of his own age, who subsequently became distinguished in the great arena of public life.

With these acquisitions, he left Westminster at the age of eighteen, in 1749; and, as if destiny had determined that all his early situations in life should

be peculiarly irksome to his delicate feelings, and tend rather to promote than to counteract his constitutional tendency to melancholy, he was removed from a public school to the office of an attorney. He resided three years in the house of a Mr. Chapman, to whom he was engaged by articles for that time. Here he was placed for the study of a profession which nature seemed resolved that he never should practise.

The law is a kind of soldiership, and, like the profession of arms, it may be said to require for the constitution of its heroes

"A frame of adamant, a soul of fire."

The soul of Cowper had indeed its fire, but fire so refined and etherial, that it could not be expected to shine in the gross atmosphere of worldly contention. Perhaps there never existed a mortal, who, possessing, with a good person, intellectual powers naturally strong and highly cultivated, was so utterly unfit to encounter the bustle and perplexities of public life. But the extreme modesty and shyness of his nature, which disqualified him for scenes of business and ambition, endeared him inexpressibly to those who had opportunities to enjoy his society, and discernment to appreciate the ripening excellencies of his character.

Reserved as he was, to an extraordinary and painful degree, his heart and mind were yet admirably fashioned by nature for all the refined intercourse and confidential enjoyment both of friendship and love: but, though apparently formed to

possess and to communicate an extraordinary portion of moral felicity, the incidents of his life were such, that, conspiring with the peculiarities of his nature, they rendered him, at different times, the victim of sorrow. The variety and depth of his sufferings in early life, from extreme tenderness of feeling, are very forcibly displayed in the following verses, which formed part of a letter to one of his female relatives, at the time they were composed. The letter has perished, and the verses owe their preservation to the affectionate memory of the lady to whom they were addressed.

Doom'd, as I am, in solitude to waste
The present moments, and regret the past;
Depriv'd of every joy I valued most,
My friend torn from me, and my mistress lost;
Call not this gloom I wear, this anxious mien,
The dull effect of humour, or of spleen!
Still, still, I mourn, with each returning day,
Him* snatch'd by fate in early youth away;
And her†—thro' tedious years of doubt and pain,
Fix'd in her choice, and faithful—but in vain!
O prone to pity, generous, and sincere,
Whose eye ne'er yet refus'd the wretch a tear;
Whose heart the real claim of friendship knows,
Nor thinks a lover's are but fancied woes;
See me—ere yet my destin'd course half done,
Cast forth a wand'rer on a world unknown!
See me neglected on the world's rude coast,
Each dear companion of my voyage lost!

* Sir William Russel, the favourite friend of the young poet.

† Miss Theodora Cowper.

Nor ask why clouds of sorrow shade my brow,
And ready tears wait only leave to flow!
Why all that soothes a heart from anguish free,
All that delights the happy—palls with me!

Having concluded the term of his engagement with the solicitor, he settled himself in chambers in the Inner Temple, as a regular student of law; but, although he resided there till the age of thirty-three, he rambled (according to his own colloquial account of his early years) from the thorny road of his austere patroness, Jurisprudence, into the primrose paths of literature and poetry. During this period, he contributed two of the Satires in Duncombe's Horace, which are worthy of his pen, and indications of his rising genius.* He also cultivated the friendship of some literary characters, who had been his schoolfellows at Westminster, particularly Colman, Bonnell Thornton, and Lloyd. Of these early associates of Cowper, it may be interesting to learn a brief history. Few men could have entered upon life with brighter prospects than Colman. His father was Envoy at the Court of Florence, and his mother was sister to the Countess of Bath. Possessed of talents that qualified him for exertion, with a classical taste perceptible in his translation of Horace's Art of Poetry, and of the works of Terence, he relinquished the bar, to which he had been called, and became principally known for his devotedness to theatrical pursuits. His private life

* See vol. viii. pp. 398—405.

was not consistent with the rules of morality; and he closed his days, after a protracted malady, by dying in a Lunatic Asylum in Paddington, in the year 1794.

To Bonnell Thornton, jointly with Colman, we owe the Connoisseur, to which Cowper contributed a few numbers. Thornton also united with Colman and Warner in a translation of Plautus. But his talents, instead of being profitably employed, were chiefly marked by a predilection for humour, in the exercise of which he was not very discreet; for the venerated muse of Gray did not escape his ridicule, and the celebrated Ode to St. Cecilia was made the occasion of a public burlesque performance, the relation of which would not accord with the design of this undertaking. He who aims at nothing better than to amuse and divert, and to excite a laugh at the expense of both taste and judgment, proposes to himself no very exalted object. Thornton died in the year 1770, aged forty-seven.

Lloyd was formerly usher at Westminster School, but feeling the irksomeness of the situation, resigned it, and commenced author. His Poems have been repeatedly republished. His life presented a scene of thoughtless extravagance and dissipation. Overwhelmed with debt, and pursued by his creditors, he was at length confined in the Fleet Prison, where he expired, the victim of his excesses, at the early age of thirty-one years.

We record these facts,—1st. That we may adore

that mercy which, by a timely interposition, rescued the future author of the Task from such impending ruin:—2ndly, To show that scenes of gaiety and dissipation, however enlivened by flashes of wit, and distinguished by literary superiority, are perilous to character, health, and fortune; and that the talents, which, if beneficially employed, might have led to happiness and honour, when perverted to unworthy ends, often lead prematurely to the grave, or render the past painful in the retrospect, and the future the subject of fearful anticipation and alarm.

Happily, Cowper escaped from this vortex of misery and ruin. His juvenile poems discover a contemplative spirit, and a mind early impressed with sentiments of piety. In proof of this assertion, we select a few stanzas from an ode written, when he was very young, on reading Sir Charles Grandison.

To rescue from the tyrant's sword
The oppress'd;—unseen, and unimplor'd,
To cheer the face of woe;
From lawless insult to defend
An orphan's right—a fallen friend,
And a forgiven foe:

These, these, distinguish from the crowd,
And these alone, the great and good,
The guardians of mankind;
Whose bosoms with these virtues heave,
Oh! with what matchless speed, they leave
The multitude behind!

Then ask ye from what cause on earth
Virtues like these derive their birth?
Derived from Heaven alone,
Full on that favour'd breast they shine,
Where faith and resignation join
To call the blessing down.

Such is that heart:—but while the Muse
Thy theme, O Richardson, pursues
Her feebler spirits faint:
She cannot reach, and would not wrong,
That subject for an angel's song,
The hero, and the saint.

His early turn to moralize on the slightest occasion will appear from the following verses, which he wrote at the age of eighteen; and in which those who love to trace the rise and progress of genius will, I think, be pleased to remark the very promising seeds of those peculiar powers, which unfolded themselves in the richest maturity at a remoter period, and rendered that beautiful and sublime poem, The Task, the most instructive and interesting of modern compositions. Young as the poet was, when he produced the following lines, we may observe that he had probably been four years in the habit of writing English verse, as he has said in one of his letters that he began his poetical career at the age of fourteen, by translating an elegy of Tibullus. I have reason to believe that he wrote many poems in his early life; and the singular merit of this juvenile composition is sufficient to make the friends of genius regret that an excess of diffidence prevented him from preserving the poetry of his youth.

VERSES

WRITTEN AT BATH, ON FINDING THE HEEL OF A SHOE, 1748.

Fortune! I thank thee: gentle goddess! thanks!
Not that my Muse, though bashful, shall deny
She would have thank'd thee rather hadst thou cast
A treasure in her way; for neither meed
Of early breakfast, to dispel the fumes
And bowel-racking pains of emptiness,
Nor noon-tide feast, nor evening's cool repast,
Hopes she from this——presumptuous, tho', perhaps,
The cobbler, leather-carving artist, might.
Nathless she thanks thee, and accepts thy boon
Whatever, not as erst the fabled cock,
Vain-glorious fool! unknowing what he found,
Spurn'd the rich gem thou gav'st him. Wherefore ah!
Why not on me that favour (worthier sure)
Conferr'dst thou, goddess! Thou art blind, thou say'st;
Enough——thy blindness shall excuse the deed.
Nor does my Muse no benefit exhale
From this thy scant indulgence!——even here,
Hints, worthy sage philosophy, are found;
Illustrious hints, to moralize my song!
This pond'rous heel of perforated hide
Compact, with pegs indented, many a row,
Haply, (for such its massy form bespeaks,)
The weighty tread of some rude peasant clown
Upbore: on this supported, oft he stretch'd,
With uncouth strides along the furrow'd glebe,
Flatt'ning the stubborn clod, 'till cruel time,
(What will not cruel time?) on a wry step,
Sever'd the strict cohesion; when, alas!
He, who could erst, with even, equal pace,
Pursue his destin'd way with symmetry,
And some proportion form'd, now, on one side,
Curtail'd and maim'd, the sport of vagrant boys,
Cursing his frail supporter, treacherous prop!
With toilsome steps, and difficult, moves on.

Thus fares it oft with other than the feet
Of humble villager——the statesman thus,
Up the steep road, where proud ambition leads,
Aspiring, first uninterrupted winds
His prosp'rous way; nor fears miscarriage foul,
While policy prevails, and friends prove true:
But that support soon failing, by him left
On whom he most depended, basely left,
Betray'd, deserted: from his airy height
Headlong he falls, and, through the rest of life,
Drags the dull load of disappointment on.

Of a youth, who, in a scene like Bath, could produce such a meditation, it might fairly be expected that he would

"In riper life, exempt from public haunt,
Find tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing."

Though extreme diffidence, and a tendency to despond, seemed early to preclude Cowper from the expectation of climbing to the splendid summit of the profession he had chosen; yet, by the interest of his family, he had prospects of emolument in a line of life that appeared better suited to the modesty of his nature and to his moderate ambition.

In his thirty-first year he was nominated to the offices of Reading Clerk and Clerk of the private Committees in the House of Lords—a situation the more desirable, as such an establishment might enable him to marry early in life; a measure, to which he was doubly disposed by judgment and inclination. But the peculiarities of his wonderful mind rendered him unable to support the ordinary duties of his new office; for the idea of

reading in public proved a source of torture to his tender and apprehensive spirit. An expedient was devised to promote his interest without wounding his feelings. Resigning his situation of Reading Clerk, he was appointed Clerk of the Journals in the same House of Parliament. Of his occupation in consequence of this new appointment he speaks in the following letter to a lady, who will become known and endeared to the reader in proportion to the interest he takes in the writings of Cowper.

TO LADY HESKETH.

The Temple, August 9, 1763.

My dear Cousin—Having promised to write to you, I make haste to be as good as my word. I have a pleasure in writing to you at any time, but especially at the present, when my days are spent in reading the Journals, and my nights in dreaming of them—an employment not very agreeable to a head that has long been habituated to the luxury of choosing its subject, and has been as little employed upon business, as if it had grown upon the shoulders of a much wealthier gentleman. But the numscull pays for it now, and will not presently forget the discipline it has undergone lately. If I succeed in this doubtful piece of promotion, I shall have at least this satisfaction to reflect upon, that the volumes I write will be treasured up with the utmost care for ages, and will last as long as the English constitution—a duration which ought to satisfy the vanity of any author, who has a spark of

love for his country. Oh my good Cousin! if I was to open my heart to you, I could show you strange sights; nothing I flatter myself that would shock you, but a great deal that would make you wonder. I am of a very singular temper, and very unlike all the men that I have ever conversed with. Certainly I am not an absolute fool: but I have more weaknesses than the greatest of all the fools I can recollect at present. In short, if I was as fit for the next world as I am unfit for this, and God forbid I should speak it in vanity, I would not change conditions with any saint in Christendom.

My destination is settled at last, and I have obtained a furlough. Margate is the word, and what do you think will ensue, Cousin? I know what you expect, but ever since I was born I have been good at disappointing the most natural expectations. Many years ago, Cousin, there was a possibility that I might prove a very different thing from what I am at present. My character is now fixed, and rivetted fast upon me, and, between friends, is not a very splendid one, or likely to be guilty of much fascination.

Adieu, my dear Cousin! so much as I love you, I wonder how it has happened I was never in love with you. Thank Heaven that I never was, for at this time I have had a pleasure in writing to you, which in that case I should have forfeited. Let me hear from you, or I shall reap but half the reward that is due to my noble indifference.

Yours ever, and evermore,

W. C.

It was hoped from the change of his station that his personal appearance in parliament might not be required, but a parliamentary dispute made it necessary for him to appear at the bar of the House of Lords, to entitle himself publicly to the office.

Speaking of this important incident in a sketch, which he once formed himself, of passages in his early life, he expressed what he endured at the time in these remarkable words: "They, whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom a public exhibition of themselves is mortal poison, may have some idea of the horrors of my situation—others can have none."

His terrors on this occasion arose to such an astonishing height, that they utterly overwhelmed his reason; for, although he had endeavoured to prepare himself for his public duty, by attending closely at the office for several months, to examine the parliamentary journals, his application was rendered useless by that excess of diffidence, which made him conceive that, whatever knowledge he might previously acquire, it would all forsake him at the bar of the House. This distressing apprehension increased to such a degree, as the time for his appearance approached, that, when the day so anxiously dreaded arrived, he was unable to make the experiment. The very friends, who called on him for the purpose of attending him to the House of Lords, acquiesced in the cruel necessity of his relinquishing the prospect of a station so severely formidable to a frame of such singular sensibility.

The conflict between the wishes of honourable

ambition and the terrors of diffidence so entirely overwhelmed his health and faculties, that, after two learned and benevolent divines (Mr. John Cowper, his brother, and the celebrated Mr. Martin Madan, his first cousin) had vainly endeavoured to establish a lasting tranquillity in his mind by friendly and religious conversation, it was found necessary to remove him to St. Alban's, where he resided a considerable time, under the care of that eminent physician, Dr. Cotton, a scholar and a poet, who added to many accomplishments a peculiar sweetness of manners, in very advanced life, when I had the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with him.

The misfortune of mental derangement is a topic of such awful delicacy, that I consider it to be the duty of a biographer rather to sink, in tender silence, than to proclaim, with circumstantial and offensive temerity, the minute particulars of a calamity, to which all human beings are exposed, and perhaps in proportion as they have received from nature those delightful but dangerous gifts, a heart of exquisite tenderness and a mind of creative energy.

> This is a sight for pity to peruse,
> 'Till she resembles, faintly, what she views;
> 'Till sympathy contracts a kindred pain,
> Pierc'd with the woes, that she laments in vain.
> This, of all maladies, that man infest,
> Claims most compassion, and receives the less.
>
> . . . . . .
> . . . . . .

But with a soul, that ever felt the sting
Of sorrow, sorrow is a sacred thing.

. . . . . .

. . . . . .

'Tis not, as heads that never ache suppose,
Forgery of fancy, and a dream of woes.
Man is a harp, whose chords elude the sight,
Each yielding harmony, dispos'd aright;
The screws revers'd (a task, which, if He please,
God, in a moment, executes with ease;)
Ten thousand, thousand strings at once go loose;
Lost, 'till He tune them, all their power and use.

. . . . . .

No wounds like those a wounded spirit feels;
No cure for such, till God, who makes them, heals.
And thou, sad sufferer, under nameless ill,
That yields not to the touch of human skill,
Improve the kind occasion, understand
A Father's frown, and kiss the chast'ning hand!

It is in this solemn and instructive light, that Cowper himself teaches us to consider the calamity of which I am now speaking; and of which, like his illustrious brother of Parnassus, the younger Tasso, he was occasionally a most affecting example. Providence appears to have given a striking lesson to mankind, to guard both virtue and genius against pride of heart and pride of intellect, by thus suspending the affections and the talents of two most tender and sublime poets, who resembled each other, not more in the attribute of poetic genius than in the similarity of the dispensation that quenched its light and ardour.

From December 1763, to the following July, the sensitive mind of Cowper appears to have laboured

under the severest suffering of morbid depression; but the medical skill of Dr. Cotton, and the cheerful, benignant, manners of that accomplished physician, gradually succeeded, with the blessing of Heaven, in removing the indescribable load of religious despondency, which had clouded the faculties of this interesting man. His ideas of religion were changed from the gloom of terror and despair to the brightness of inward joy and peace.

This juster and happier view of evangelical truth is said to have arisen in his mind, while he was reading the third chapter of Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans. The words that rivetted his attention were the following: "*Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.*" Rom. iii. 25. It was to this passage, which contains so lucid an exposition of the Gospel method of salvation, that, under the divine blessing, the poet owed the recovery of a previously disordered intellect and the removal of a load from a deeply oppressed conscience—he saw, by a new and powerful perception, how sin could be pardoned, and the sinner be saved—that the way appointed of God was through the great propitiation and sacrifice upon the cross—that faith lays hold of the promise, and thus becomes the instrument of conveying pardon and peace to the soul.

It is remarkable how God, in every age, from the first promulgation of the Gospel to the present

time, and under all the various modifications of society, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, has put his seal to this fundamental doctrine of the Gospel.

Whether we contemplate man amid the polished scenes of civilized and enlightened Europe, or the rude ferocity of savage tribes—whether it be the refined Hindoo, or the unlettered Hottentot, whose mind becomes accessible to the power and influences of religion, the cause and the effect are the same. It is the doctrine of the cross that works the mighty change. The worldly wise may reject this doctrine, the spiritually wise comprehend and receive it. But, whether it be rejected, with all its tremendous responsibilities, or received with its inestimable blessings, the truth itself still remains unchanged and unchangeable, attested by the records of every church and the experience of every believing heart—"*the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.*" 1 Cor. i. 18.

It is impossible not to admire the power, and adore the mercy that thus wrought a double deliverance in the mind of Cowper by a process so remarkable. Devout contemplation became more and more dear to his reviving spirit. Resolving to relinquish all thoughts of a laborious profession, and all intercourse with the busy world, he acquiesced in a plan of settling at Huntingdon, by the advice of his brother, who, as a minister of the Gospel, and a fellow of Bennet College, Cambridge, resided in that University; a situation so near to the place

chosen for Cowper's retirement, that it afforded to these affectionate brothers opportunities of easy and frequent intercourse. I regret that all the letters which passed between them have perished, and the more so as they sometimes corresponded in verse. John Cowper was also a poet. He had engaged to execute a translation of Voltaire's Henriade, and in the course of the work requested, and obtained, the assistance of William, who translated, as he informed me himself, two entire cantos of the poem. This fraternal production is said to have appeared in a magazine of the year 1759. I have discovered a rival, and probably an inferior translation, so published, but the joint work of the poetical brothers has hitherto eluded all my researches.

In June 1765, the reviving invalid removed to a private lodging in the town of Huntingdon, but Providence soon introduced him into a family, which afforded him one of the most singular and valuable friends that ever watched an afflicted mortal in seasons of overwhelming adversity; that friend, to whom the poet exclaims in the commencement of the Task,

> And witness, dear companion of my walks
> Whose arm, this twentieth winter, I perceive
> Fast lock'd in mine, with pleasure, such as love,
> Confirmed by long experience of thy worth,
> And well tried virtues, could alone inspire;
> Witness a joy, that thou hast doubled long!
> Thou knowest my praise of Nature most sincere;
> And that my raptures are not conjured up
> To serve occasions of poetic pomp,
> But genuine, and art partner of them all.

These verses would be alone sufficient to make every poetical reader take a lively interest in the lady they describe; but these are far from being the only tribute which the gratitude of Cowper has paid to the endearing virtues of his female companion. More poetical memorials of her merit will be found in these volumes, and in verse so exquisite, that it may be questioned if the most passionate love ever gave rise to poetry more tender or more sublime.

Yet, in this place, it appears proper to apprize the reader, that it was not love, in the common acceptation of the word, which inspired these admirable eulogies. The attachment of Cowper to Mrs. Unwin, the Mary of the poet, was an attachment perhaps unparalleled. Their domestic union, though not sanctioned by the common forms of life, was supported with perfect innocence, and endeared to them both, by their having struggled together through a series of sorrow. A spectator of sensibility, who had contemplated the uncommon tenderness of their attention to the wants and infirmities of each other in the decline of life, might have said of their singular attachment,

L'Amour n'a rien de si tendre,
Ni l'Amitié de si doux.

As a connexion so extraordinary forms a striking feature in the history of the poet, the reader will probably be anxious to investigate its origin and progress.—It arose from the following little incident.

The countenance and deportment of Cowper, though they indicated his native shyness, had yet very singular powers of attraction. On his first appearance in one of the churches of Huntingdon, he engaged the notice and respect of an amiable young man, William Cawthorne Unwin, then a student at Cambridge, who, having observed, after divine service, that the interesting stranger was taking a solitary turn under a row of trees, was irresistibly led to share his walk, and to solicit his acquaintance.

They were soon pleased with each other, and the intelligent youth, charmed with the acquisition of such a friend, was eager to communicate the treasure to his parents, who had long resided in Huntingdon.

Mr. Unwin, the father, had for some years been master of a free school in the town; but, as he advanced in life, he quitted the laborious situation, and, settling in a large convenient house in the High-street, contented himself with a few domestic pupils, whom he instructed in classical literature.

This worthy divine, who was now far advanced in years, had been lecturer to the two churches at Huntingdon, before he obtained from his college at Cambridge the living of Grimston. While he lived in expectation of this preferment, he had attached himself to a young lady of lively talents, and remarkably fond of reading. This lady, who, in the process of time, and by a series of singular events, became the friend and guardian of Cowper, was the daughter of Mr. Cawthorne, a draper in

Ely. She was married to Mr. Unwin, on his succeeding to the preferment that he expected from his college, and settled with him on his living of Grimston; but, not liking the situation and society of that sequestered scene, she prevailed on her husband to establish himself in Huntingdon, where he was known and respected.

They had resided there many years, and, with their two only children, a son and a daughter, they formed a cheerful and social family, when the younger Unwin, described by Cowper as

> "A friend,
> Whose worth deserves the warmest lay,
> That ever Friendship penn'd,"

presented to his parents the solitary stranger, on whose retirement he had benevolently intruded, and whose welfare he became more and more anxious to promote. An event highly pleasing and comfortable to Cowper soon followed this introduction; he was affectionately solicited by all the Unwins to relinquish his lonely lodging, and to become a part of their family.

We are now arrived at that period in the personal history of Cowper, when we are fortunately enabled to employ his own descriptive powers in recording the events and characters that particularly interested him, and in displaying the state of his mind at a remarkable season of his chequered life. The following are among the earliest letters of this affectionate writer, which the kindness of his friends

and relatives has supplied towards the execution and embellishment of this work.

Among his juvenile intimates and correspondents, he particularly regarded two gentlemen, who devoted themselves to different branches of the law, the first Lord Thurlow, and Joseph Hill, Esq. whose name appears in the second volume of Cowper's Poems, prefixed to a few verses of exquisite beauty, a brief epistle, that seems to have more of the genuine ease, spirit, and moral gaiety of Horace, than any original epistle in the English language. From these two confidential associates of the poet, in his unclouded years, we might have expected materials for the display of his early genius; but, in the torrent of busy and splendid life, which bore the first of them to a mighty distance from his less ambitious fellow-student of the Temple, the private letters and verses that arose from their youthful intimacy have perished.

The letters to Mr. Hill are copious, and extend through a long period of time, and, although many of them are of a nature not suited to publication, yet many others will illustrate and embellish these volumes. The steadiness and integrity of Mr. Hill's regard for a person so much sequestered from his sight gives him a particular title to be distinguished among those whom Cowper has honoured, by addressing to them his highly interesting and affectionate letters. Many of these, which we shall occasionally introduce in the parts of the narrative to which they belong, may tend to confirm a truth, not unpleasing to the majority of readers, that the

temperate zone of moderate fortune, equally removed from high and low life, is most favourable to the permanence of friendship.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Huntingdon, June 24, 1765.

Dear Joe—The only recompence I can make you for your kind attention to my affairs, during my illness, is to tell you that, by the mercy of God, I am restored to perfect health, both of mind and body. This, I believe, will give you pleasure, and I would gladly do any thing from which you could receive it.

I left St. Alban's on the 17th, and arrived that day at Cambridge, spent some time there with my brother, and came hither on the 22nd. I have a lodging that puts me continually in mind of our summer excursions; we have had many worse, and except the size of it (which however is sufficient for a single man) but few better. I am not quite alone, having brought a servant with me from St. Alban's, who is the very mirror of fidelity and affection for his master. And, whereas the Turkish Spy says, he kept no servant because he would not have an enemy in his house, I hired mine because I would have a friend. Men do not usually bestow these encomiums on their lackeys, nor do they usually deserve them, but I have had experience of mine, both in sickness and in health, and never saw his fellow.

The river Ouse, I forget how they spell it, is the most agreeable circumstance in this part of the world; at this town it is, I believe, as wide as the Thames at Windsor; nor does the silver Thames better deserve that epithet, nor has it more flowers upon its banks, these being attributes which, in strict truth, belong to neither. Fluellin would say, they are as like as my fingers to my fingers, and there is salmon in both. It is a noble stream to bathe in, and I shall make that use of it three times a week, having introduced myself to it for the first time this morning.

I beg you will remember me to all my friends, which is a task will cost you no great pains to execute—particularly remember me to those of your own house, and believe me

Your very affectionate
W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Huntingdon, July 1, 1765.

My dear Lady Hesketh—Since the visit you were so kind to pay me in the Temple, (the only time I ever saw you without pleasure,) what have I not suffered? And, since it has pleased God to restore me to the use of my reason, what have I not enjoyed? You know, by experience, how pleasant it is to feel the first approaches of health after a fever; but, oh! the fever of the brain! To feel the quenching of that fire is indeed a blessing

which I think it impossible to receive without the most consummate gratitude. Terrible as this chastisement is, I acknowledge in it the hand of an infinite justice; nor is it at all more difficult for me to perceive in it the hand of an infinite mercy likewise: when I consider the effect it has had upon me, I am exceedingly thankful for it, and, without hypocrisy, esteem it the greatest blessing, next to life itself, I ever received from the divine bounty. I pray God that I may ever retain this sense of it, and then I am sure I shall continue to be, as I am at present, really happy.

I write thus to you, that you may not think me a forlorn and wretched creature; which you might be apt to do considering my very distant removal from every friend I have in the world—a circumstance which, before this event befel me, would undoubtedly have made me so; but my affliction has taught me a road to happiness, which, without it, I should never have found; and I know, and have experience of it every day, that the mercy of God, to him who believes himself the object of it, is more than sufficient to compensate for the loss of every other blessing.

You may now inform all those whom you think really interested in my welfare, that they have no need to be apprehensive on the score of my happiness at present. And you yourself will believe that my happiness is no dream, because I have told you the foundation on which it is built. What I have written would appear like enthusiasm to many, for we are apt to give that name to every warm

affection of the mind in others, which we have not experienced in ourselves; but to you, who have so much to be thankful for, and a temper inclined to gratitude, it will not appear so.

I beg you will give my love to Sir Thomas, and believe that I am obliged to you both for inquiring after me at St. Alban's.

Yours ever,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Huntingdon, July 3, 1765.

Dear Joe—Whatever you may think of the matter, it is no such easy thing to keep house for two people. A man cannot always live like the lions in the Tower; and a joint of meat, in so small a family, is an endless incumbrance. In short, I never knew how to pity poor housekeepers before; but now I cease to wonder at that politic cast which their occupation usually gives to their countenance, for it is really a matter full of perplexity.

I have received but one visit since here I came. I don't mean that I have refused any, but that only one has been offered. This was from my woollen-draper; a very healthy, wealthy, sensible, sponsible man, and extremely civil. He has a cold bath, and has promised me a key of it, which I shall probably make use of in the winter. He has under-

* Private Correspondence.

taken, too, to get me the St. James's Chronicle three times a-week, and to shew me Hinchinbrook House, and to do every service for me in his power; so that I did not exceed the truth, you see, when I spoke of his civility. Here is a card-assembly, and a dancing-assembly, and a horse-race, and a club, and a bowling-green, so that I am well off, you perceive, in point of diversions; especially as I shall go to 'em, just as much as I should if I lived a thousand miles off. But no matter for that; the spectator at a play is more entertained than the actor; and in real life it is much the same. You will say, perhaps, that if I never frequent these places, I shall not come within the description of a spectator; and you will say right. I have made a blunder, which shall be corrected in the next edition.

You are old dog at a bad tenant; witness all my uncle's and your mother's geese and gridirons. There is something so extremely impertinent in entering upon a man's premises, and using them without paying for 'em, that I could easily resent it if I would. But I rather choose to entertain myself with thinking how you will scour the man about, and worry him to death, if once you begin with him. Poor wretch! I leave him entirely to your mercy.

My dear Joe, you desire me to write long letters —I have neither matter enough nor perseverance enough for the purpose. However, if you can but contrive to be tired of reading as soon as I am tired of writing, we shall find that short ones

answer just as well; and, in my opinion, this is a very practicable measure.

My friend Colman has had good fortune: I wish him better fortune still; which is, that he may make a right use of it. The tragedies of Lloyd and Bensley are both very deep. If they are not of use to the surviving part of the society, it is their own fault.

I was debtor to Bensley seven pounds, or nine, I forget which. If you can find out his brother, you will do me a great favour if you will pay him for me; but do it at your leisure.

Yours and theirs,*

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Huntingdon, July 4, 1765.

Being just emerged from the Ouse, I sit down to thank you, my dear cousin, for your friendly and comfortable letter. What could you think of my unaccountable behaviour to you in that visit I mentioned in my last? I remember I neither spoke to you nor looked at you. The solution of the mystery indeed followed soon after, but at the same time it must have been inexplicable. The uproar

* The author is supposed to mean Mrs. Hill and her two daughters. The word *theirs* cannot so well refer to the last antecedent, the persons who stand in that relation with it being both dead at the time he wrote, as is evident from the context.

within was even then begun, and my silence was only the sulkiness of a thunder-storm before it opens. I am glad, however, that the only instance in which I knew not how to value your company was when I was not in my senses. It was the first of the kind, and I trust in God it will be the last.

How naturally does affliction make us Christians! and how impossible it is when all human help is vain, and the whole earth too poor and trifling to furnish us with one moment's peace, how impossible is it then to avoid looking at the Gospel! It gives me some concern, though at the same time it increases my gratitude, to reflect, that a convert made in Bedlam is more likely to be a stumbling-block to others than to advance their faith. But, if it has that effect upon any, it is owing to their reasoning amiss, and drawing their conclusions from false premises. He who can ascribe an amendment of life and manners and a reformation of the heart itself to madness, is guilty of an absurdity that in any other case would fasten the imputation of madness upon himself; for, by so doing, he ascribes a reasonable effect to an unreasonable cause, and a positive effect to a negative. But, when Christianity only is to be sacrificed, he that stabs deepest is always the wisest man. You, my dear cousin, yourself will be apt to think I carry the matter too far, and that, in the present warmth of my heart, I make too ample a concession in saying, that I am *only now* a convert. You think I always believed, and I thought so too, but you were deceived, and so was I. I called myself indeed a Christian, but

He who knows my heart, knows that I never did a right thing, nor abstained from a wrong one, because I was so. But, if I did either, it was under the influence of some other motive. And it is such seeming Christians, such pretending believers, that do most mischief to the cause, and furnish the strongest arguments to support the infidelity of its enemies: unless profession and conduct go together, the man's life is a lie, and the validity of what he professes itself is called in question. The difference between a Christian and an unbeliever would be so striking, if the treacherous allies of the church would go over at once to the other side, that I am satisfied religion would be no loser by the bargain.

I reckon it one instance of the providence that has attended me throughout this whole event, that, instead of being delivered into the hands of one of the London physicians—who were so much nearer, that I wonder I was not—I was carried to Dr. Cotton. I was not only treated by him with the greatest tenderness while I was ill, and attended with the utmost diligence, but when my reason was restored to me, and I had so much need of a religious friend to converse with, to whom I could open my mind upon the subject without reserve, I could hardly have found a fitter person for the purpose. My eagerness and anxiety to settle my opinions upon that long-neglected point made it necessary, that while my mind was yet weak, and my spirits uncertain, I should have some assistance. The doctor was as ready to administer relief to me in this article likewise, and as well qualified to do

it as in that which was more immediately his province. How many physicians would have thought this an irregular appetite and a symptom of remaining madness! But if it were so, my friend was as mad as myself, and it is well for me that he was so.

My dear cousin, you know not half the deliverances I have received; my brother is the only one in the family who does. My recovery is indeed a signal one, but a greater, if possible, went before it. My future life must express my thankfulness, for by words I cannot do it.

I pray God to bless you, and my friend Sir Thomas.

Yours ever,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Huntingdon, July 5, 1765.

My dear Lady Hesketh—My pen runs so fast you will begin to wish you had not put it in motion, but you must consider we have not met, even by letter, almost these two years, which will account, in some measure, for my pestering you in this manner; besides my last was no answer to yours, and therefore I consider myself as still in your debt. To say truth, I have this long time promised myself a correspondence with you as one of my principal pleasures.

I should have written to you from St. Alban's long since, but was willing to perform quarantine

first, both for my own sake, and because I thought my letters would be more satisfactory to you from any other quarter. You will perceive I allowed myself a very sufficient time for the purpose, for I date my recovery from the 25th of last July, having been ill seven months, and well twelve months. It was on that day my brother came to see me; I was far from well when he came in; yet though he only stayed one day with me, his company served to put to flight a thousand deliriums and delusions which I still laboured under, and the next morning found myself a new creature. But to the present purpose.

As far as I am acquainted with this place, I like it extremely. Mr. Hodgson, the minister of the parish, made me a visit the day before yesterday. He is very sensible, a good preacher, and conscientious in the discharge of his duty. He is very well known to Dr. Newton, Bishop of Bristol, the author of the Treatise on the Prophecies, one of our best bishops, and who has written the most demonstrative proof of the truth of Christianity, in my mind, that ever was published.

There is a village, called Hertford, about a mile and a half from hence. The church there is very prettily situated upon a rising ground, so close to the river that it washes the wall of the churchyard. I found an epitaph there the other morning, the two first lines of which being better than any thing else I saw there, I made shift to remember. It is by a widow on her husband.

"Thou wast too good to live on earth with me,
And I not good enough to die with thee."

The distance of this place from Cambridge is the worst circumstance belonging to it. My brother and I are fifteen miles asunder, which, considering that I came hither for the sake of being near him, is rather too much. I wish that young man was better known in the family. He has as many good qualities as his nearest kindred could wish to find in him.

As Mr. Quin very roundly expressed himself upon some such occasion, "here is very plentiful accommodation, and great happiness of provision." So that if I starve, it must be through forgetfulness rather than scarcity.

Fare thee well, my good and dear cousin.

Ever yours,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

July 12, 1765.

My dear Cousin—You are very good to me, and if you will only continue to write at such intervals as you find convenient, I shall receive all that pleasure, which I proposed to myself from our correspondence. I desire no more than that you would never drop me for any length of time together, for I shall then think you only write because something happened to put you in mind of me, or for some

other reason equally mortifying. I am not however so unreasonable as to expect you should perform this act of friendship so frequently as myself, for you live in a world swarming with engagements, and my hours are almost all my own. You must every day be employed in doing what is expected from you by a thousand others, and I have nothing to do but what is most agreeable to myself.

Our mentioning Newton's treatise on the Prophecies brings to my mind an anecdote of Dr. Young, who you know died lately at Welwyn. Dr. Cotton, who was intimate with him, paid him a visit about a fortnight before he was seized with his last illness. The old man was then in perfect health; the antiquity of his person, the gravity of his utterance, and the earnestness with which he discoursed about religion, gave him, in the doctor's eye, the appearance of a prophet. They had been delivering their sentiments upon this book of Newton, when Young closed the conference thus:—"My friend, there are two considerations upon which my faith in Christ is built as upon a rock: the fall of man, the redemption of man, and the resurrection of man, the three cardinal articles of our religion, are such as human ingenuity could never have invented, therefore they must be divine; the other argument is this. If the prophecies have been fulfilled (of which there is abundant demonstration) the Scripture must be the word of God, and if the Scripture is the word of God, Christianity must be true."

This treatise on the prophecies serves a double purpose; it not only proves the truth of religion, in

a manner that never has been, nor ever can be controverted; but it proves likewise, that the Roman Catholic is the apostate, and the anti-Christian church, so frequently foretold both in the Old and New Testaments. Indeed so fatally connected is the refutation of Popery with the truth of Christianity, when the latter is evinced by the completion of the prophecies, that, in proportion as light is thrown upon the one, the deformities and errors of the other are more plainly exhibited. But I leave you to the book itself; there are parts of it which may possibly afford you less entertainment than the rest, because you have never been a school-boy, but in the main it is so interesting, and you are so fond of that which is so, that I am sure you will like it.

My dear cousin, how happy am I in having a friend, to whom I can open my heart upon these subjects! I have many intimates in the world, and have had many more than I shall have hereafter, to whom a long letter upon these most important articles would appear tiresome at least, if not impertinent. But I am not afraid of meeting with that reception from you, who have never yet made it your interest that there should be no truth in the word of God. May this everlasting truth be your comfort while you live, and attend you with peace and joy in your last moments! I love you too well not to make this a part of my prayers; and when I remember my friends on these occasions, there is no likelihood that you can be forgotten.

Yours ever,

W. C.

P. S.—Cambridge. I add this postscript at my brother's rooms. He desires to be affectionately remembered to you, and if you are in town about a fortnight hence, when he proposes to be there himself, will take a breakfast with you.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Huntingdon, August 1st, 1765.

My dear Cousin—If I was to measure your obligation to write by my own desire to hear from you, I should call you an idle correspondent if a post went by without bringing a letter, but I am not so unreasonable; on the contrary, I think myself very happy in hearing from you upon your own terms, as you find most convenient. Your short history of my family is a very acceptable part of your letter; if they really interest themselves in my welfare, it is a mark of their great charity for one who has been a disappointment and a vexation to them ever since he has been of consequence enough to be either. My friend the major's behaviour to me, after all he suffered by my abandoning his interest and my own, in so miserable a manner, is a noble instance of generosity and true greatness of mind: and indeed, I know no man in whom those qualities are more conspicuous; one need only furnish him with an opportunity to display them, and they are always ready to show themselves in his words and actions, and even in his countenance, at a moment's warning. I have great reason to be

thankful—I have lost none of my acquaintance, but those whom I determined not to keep. I am sorry this class is so numerous. What would I not give that every friend I have in the world were not almost but altogether Christians. My dear cousin, I am half afraid to talk in this style, lest I should seem to indulge a censorious humour, instead of hoping, as I ought, the best for all men. But what can be said against ocular proof, and what is hope when it is built upon presumption? To use the most holy name in the universe for no purpose, or a bad one, contrary to his own express commandment; to pass the day, and the succeeding days, weeks, and months, and years, without one act of private devotion, one confession of our sins, or one thanksgiving for the numberless blessings we enjoy; to hear the word of God in public, with a distracted attention, or with none at all; to absent ourselves voluntarily from the blessed Communion, and to live in the total neglect of it, though our Saviour has charged it upon us with an express injunction—are the common and ordinary liberties which the generality of professors allow themselves; and what is this but to live without God in the world? Many causes may be assigned for this Anti-christian spirit, so prevalent among Christians, but one of the principal I take to be their utter forgetfulness that they have the word of God in their possession.

My friend, Sir William Russel, was distantly related to a very accomplished man, who, though he never believed the Gospel, admired the Scriptures

as the sublimest compositions in the world, and read them often. I have been intimate myself with a man of fine taste, who has confessed to me that, though he could not subscribe to the truth of Christianity itself, yet he never could read St. Luke's account of our Saviour's appearance to the two disciples going to Emmaus without being wonderfully affected by it, and he thought that, if the stamp of divinity was any where to be found in Scripture, it was strongly marked and visibly impressed upon that passage. If these men, whose hearts were chilled with the darkness of infidelity, could find such charms in the mere style of the Scripture, what must they find there whose eye penetrates deeper than the letter, and who firmly believe themselves interested in all the valuable privileges of the Gospel? "He that believeth on me is passed from death unto life," though it be as plain a sentence as words can form, has more beauties in it for such a person than all the labours antiquity can boast of. If my poor man of taste, whom I have just mentioned, had searched a little further, he might have found other parts of the sacred history as strongly marked with the characters of divinity, as that he mentioned. The parable of the prodigal son, the most beautiful fiction that ever was invented; our Saviour's speech to his disciples, with which he closes his earthly ministration, full of the sublimest dignity, and tenderest affection; surpass every thing that I ever read, and, like the spirit by which they were dictated, fly directly to the heart. If the Scripture did not disdain all

affectation of ornament, one should call these, and such as these, the ornamental parts of it, but the matter of it is that upon which it principally stakes its credit with us, and the style, however excellent and peculiar to itself, is the only one of those many external evidences by which it recommends itself to our belief.

I shall be very much obliged to you for the book you mention; you could not have sent me any thing that would have been more welcome, unless you had sent me your own meditations instead of them.

Yours,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ. *

August 14th, 1765.

Dear Joe—Both Lady Hesketh and my brother had apprized me of your intention to give me a call; and herein I find they were both mistaken. But they both informed me, likewise, that you were already set out for Warwickshire; in consequence of which latter intelligence, I have lived in continual expectation of seeing you, any time this fortnight. Now, how these two ingenious personages (for such they are both) should mistake an expedition to French Flanders for a journey to Warwickshire, is more than I, with all my ingenuity, can imagine. I am glad, however, that I have still a

* Private correspondence.

chance of seeing you, and shall treasure it up amongst my agreeable expectations. In the mean time, you are welcome to the British shore, as the song has it, and I thank you for your epitome of your travels. You don't tell me how you escaped the vigilance of the custom-house officers, though I dare say you were knuckle-deep in contrabands, and had your boots stuffed with all and all manner of unlawful wares and merchandizes.

You know, Joe, I am very deep in debt to my little physician at St. Alban's, and that the handsomest thing I can do will be to pay him *le plutôt qu'il sera possible*, (that is vile French, I believe, but you can, now, correct it.) My brother informs me that you have such a quantity of cash in your hands on my account, that I may venture to send him forty pounds immediately. This, therefore, I shall be obliged if you will manage for me; and when you receive the hundred pounds, which my brother likewise brags you are shortly to receive, I shall be glad if you will discharge the remainder of that debt, without waiting for any further advice from your humble servant.

I am become a professed horseman, and do hereby assume to myself the style and title of the Knight of the Bloody Spur. It has cost me much to bring this point to bear; but I think I have at last accomplished it. My love to all your family.

Yours ever,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Huntingdon, August 17, 1765.

You told me, my dear cousin, that I need not fear writing too often, and you perceive I take you at your word. At present, however, I shall do little more than thank you for your Meditations, which I admire exceedingly; the author of them manifestly loved the truth with an undissembled affection, had made great progress in the knowledge of it, and experienced all the happiness that naturally results from that noblest of all attainments. There is one circumstance which he gives us frequent occasion to observe in him, which I believe will ever be found in the philosophy of every true Christian. I mean the eminent rank which he assigns to faith among the virtues, as the source and parent of them all. There is nothing more infallibly true than this, and doubtless it is with a view to the purifying and sanctifying nature of a true faith, that our Saviour says "He that believeth in me hath everlasting life," with many other expressions to the same purpose. Considered in this light, no wonder it has the power of salvation ascribed to it. Considered in any other, we must suppose it to operate like an oriental talisman, if it obtains for us the least advantage; which is an affront to Him, who insists upon our having it, and will on no other terms admit us to his favour. I mention this distinguishing article in his Reflections, the rather because it serves for a solid foun-

dation to the distinction I made in my last, between the specious professor and the true believer, between him whose faith is his Sunday-suit and him who never puts it off at all—a distinction I am a little fearful sometimes of making, because it is a heavy stroke upon the practice of more than half the Christians in the world.

My dear cousin, I told you I read the book with great pleasure, which may be accounted for from its own merit, but perhaps it pleased me the more because you had travelled the same road before me. You know there is no such pleasure as this, which would want great explanation to some folks, being perhaps a mystery to those, whose hearts are a mere muscle and serve only for the purposes of an even circulation.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Sept. 4, 1765.

Though I have some very agreeable acquaintance at Huntingdon, my dear cousin, none are so agreeable as the arrival of your letters. I thank you for that which I have just received from Droxford, and particularly for that part of it, where you give me an unlimited liberty upon the subject I have already so often written upon. Whatever interests us deeply, as naturally flows into the pen as it does from the lips, when every restraint is taken away, and we meet with a friend indulgent enough to attend to us. How many, in all that variety of

characters with whom I am acquainted, could I find, after the strictest search, to whom I could write as I do to you? I hope the number will increase: I am sure it cannot easily be diminished. Poor ——! I have heard the whole of his history, and can only lament what I am sure I can make no apology for. Two of my friends have been cut off during my illness, in the midst of such a life as it is frightful to reflect upon, and here am I, in better health and spirits than I can almost remember to have enjoyed before, after having spent months in the apprehension of instant death. How mysterious are the ways of Providence! Why did I receive grace and mercy? Why was I preserved, afflicted for my good, received, as I trust, into favour, and blessed with the greatest happiness I can ever know, or hope for, in this life, while these were overtaken by the great arrest, unawakened, unrepenting, and every way unprepared for it? His infinite wisdom, to whose infinite mercy I owe it all, can solve these questions, and none besides him. If a freethinker, as many a man miscalls himself, could be brought to give a serious answer to them, he would certainly say, "Without doubt, Sir, you were in great danger, you had a narrow escape; a most fortunate one, indeed." How excessively foolish, as well as shocking! As if life depended upon luck, and all that we are or can be, all that we have or hope for, could possibly be referred to accident. Yet to this freedom of thought it is owing that He, who, as our Saviour tells us, is thoroughly apprized of the death of the meanest of

his creatures, is supposed to leave those, whom he has made in his own image, to the mercy of chance: and to this therefore it is likewise owing, that the correction which our Heavenly Father bestows upon us, that we may be fitted to receive his blessing, is so often disappointed of its benevolent intention, and that men despise the chastening of the Almighty. Fevers and all diseases are accidents, and long life, recovery at least from sickness, is the gift of the physician. No man can be a greater friend to the use of means upon these occasions than myself, for it were presumption and enthusiasm to neglect them. God has endued them with salutary properties on purpose that we might avail ourselves of them, otherwise that part of his creation were in vain. But to impute our recovery to the medicine, and to carry our views no further, is to rob God of his honour, and is saying in effect that he has parted with the keys of life and death, and, by giving to a drug the power to heal us, has placed our lives out of his own reach. He that thinks thus, may as well fall upon his knees at once, and return thanks to the medicine that cured him, for it was certainly more instrumental in his recovery than either the apothecary or the doctor. My dear cousin, a firm persuasion of the superintendence of Providence over all our concerns is absolutely necessary to our happiness. Without it, we cannot be said to believe in the Scripture, or practise any thing like resignation to his will. If I am convinced that no affliction can befall me without the permission of God, I am convinced likewise that he sees and

knows that I am afflicted; believing this, I must, in the same degree, believe that if I pray to him for deliverance he hears me; I must needs know likewise, with equal assurance, that if he hears he will also deliver me, if that will upon the whole be most conducive to my happiness; and, if he does not deliver me, I may be well assured that he has none but the most benevolent intention in declining it. He made us, not because we could add to his happiness, which was always perfect, but that we might be happy ourselves; and will he not, in all his dispensations towards us, even in the minutest, consult that end for which he made us? To suppose the contrary, is (which we are not always aware of) affronting every one of his attributes, and at the same time the certain consequence of disbelieving his care for us is that we renounce utterly our dependence upon him. In this view it will appear plainly that the line of duty is not stretched too tight, when we are told that we ought to accept every thing at his hands as a blessing, and to be thankful even while we smart under the rod of iron, with which he sometimes rules us. Without this persuasion, every blessing, however we may think ourselves happy in it, loses its greatest recommendation, and every affliction is intolerable. Death itself must be welcome to him who has this faith, and he who has it not must aim at it, if he is not a madman. You cannot think how glad I am to hear you are going to commence lady, and mistress of Freemantle.* I know it well, and could go to it

* Freemantle, a villa near Southampton.

from Southampton blindfold. You are kind to invite me to it, and I shall be so kind to myself as to accept the invitation, though I should not, for a slight consideration, be prevailed upon to quit my beloved retirement at Huntingdon.

Yours ever,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Huntingdon, Sept. 14, 1765.

My dear Cousin—The longer I live here, the better I like the place, and the people who belong to it. I am upon very good terms with no less than five families, besides two or three odd scrambling fellows like myself. The last acquaintance I made here is with the race of the Unwins, consisting of father and mother, son and daughter, the most comfortable, social folks you ever knew. The son is about twenty-one years of age, one of the most unreserved and amiable young men I ever conversed with. He is not yet arrived at that time of life, when suspicion recommends itself to us in the form of wisdom, and sets every thing but our own dear selves at an immeasurable distance from our esteem and confidence. Consequently, he is known almost as soon as seen, and, having nothing in his heart that makes it necessary for him to keep it barred and bolted, opens it to the perusal even of a stranger. The father is a clergyman, and the son is designed for orders. The design however is quite his own, proceeding merely from his

being, and having always been, sincere in his belief and love of the Gospel. Another acquaintance I have lately made is with a Mr. Nicholson, a north-country divine, very poor, but very good, and very happy. He reads prayers here twice a day, all the year round, and travels on foot to serve two churches every Sunday through the year, his journey out and home again being sixteen miles. I supped with him last night. He gave me bread and cheese, and a black jug of ale of his own brewing, and doubtless brewed by his own hands. Another of my acquaintance is Mr. ——, a thin, tall, old man, and as good as he is thin. He drinks nothing but water, and eats no flesh, partly (I believe) from a religious scruple (for he is very religious) and partly in the spirit of a valetudinarian. He is to be met with every morning of his life, at about six o'clock, at a fountain of very fine water, about a mile from the town, which is reckoned extremely like the Bristol spring. Being both early risers, and the only early walkers in the place, we soon became acquainted. His great piety can be equalled by nothing but his great regularity; for he is the most perfect timepiece in the world. I have received a visit likewise from Mr. ——. He is very much a gentleman, well-read, and sensible. I am persuaded, in short, that if I had had the choice of all England where to fix my abode, I could not have chosen better for myself, and most likely I should not have chosen so well.

You say, you hope it is not necessary for salvation to undergo the same afflictions that I have

undergone. No! my dear cousin, God deals with his children as a merciful father; he does not, as he himself tells us, afflict willingly the sons of men. Doubtless there are many, who, having been placed by his good providence out of the reach of any great evil and the influence of bad example, have, from their very infancy, been partakers of the grace of his Holy Spirit, in such a manner as never to have allowed themselves in any grievous offence against him. May you love him more and more, day by day, as every day, while you think upon him, you will find him more worthy of your love, and may you be finally accepted by him for his sake, whose intercession for all his faithful servants cannot but prevail!

Yours ever,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Huntingdon, Oct. 10, 1765.

My dear Cousin—I should grumble at your long silence, if I did not know that one may love one's friends very well, though one is not always in a humour to write to them. Besides, I have the satisfaction of being perfectly sure that you have at least twenty times recollected the debt you owe me, and as often resolved to pay it: and perhaps, while you remain indebted to me, you think of me twice as often as you would do if the account was clear. These are the reflections with which I comfort

myself under the affliction of not hearing from you; my temper does not incline me to jealousy, and, if it did, I should set all right by having recourse to what I have already received from you.

I thank God for your friendship, and for every friend I have; for all the pleasing circumstances here; for my health of body, and perfect serenity of mind. To recollect the past and compare it with the present is all I have need of to fill me with gratitude; and to be grateful is to be happy. Not that I think myself sufficiently thankful, or that I ever shall be so in this life. The warmest heart perhaps only feels by fits and is often as insensible as the coldest. This at least is frequently the case with mine, and oftener than it should be. But the mercy that can forgive iniquity will never be severe to mark our frailties; to that mercy, my dear cousin, I commend you, with earnest wishes for your welfare, and remain your ever affectionate

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Huntingdon, Oct. 18, 1765.

I wish you joy, my dear cousin, of being safely arrived in port from the storms of Southampton. For my own part, who am but as a Thames wherry, in a world full of tempest and commotion, I know so well the value of the creek I have put into, and the snugness it affords me, that I have a sensible sympathy with you in the pleasure you find in

being once more blown to Droxford. I know enough of Miss Morley to send her my compliments, to which, if I had never seen her, her affection for you would sufficiently entitle her. If I neglected to do it sooner, it is only because I am naturally apt to neglect what I ought to do: and if I was as genteel as I am negligent I should be the most delightful creature in the universe. I am glad you think so favourably of my Huntingdon acquaintance; they are indeed a nice set of folks, and suit me exactly. I should have been more particular in my account of Miss Unwin, if I had had materials for a minute description. She is about eighteen years of age, rather handsome and genteel. In her mother's company she says little, not because her mother requires it of her, but because she seems glad of that excuse for not talking, being somewhat inclined to bashfulness. There is the most remarkable cordiality between all the parts of the family, and the mother and daughter seem to doat upon each other. The first time I went to the house, I was introduced to the daughter alone; and sat with her near half an hour before her brother came in, who had appointed me to call upon him. Talking is necessary in a *tête-à-tête*, to distinguish the persons of the drama from the chairs they sit on: accordingly, she talked a great deal and extremely well; and, like the rest of the family, behaved with as much ease and address as if we had been old acquaintance. She resembles her mother in her great piety, who is one of the most remarkable instances of it I have ever seen.

They are altogether the cheerfullest and most engaging family-piece it is possible to conceive. Since I wrote the above, I met Mrs. Unwin in the street, and went home with her. She and I walked together near two hours in the garden, and had a conversation which did me more good than I should have received from an audience of the first prince in Europe. That woman is a blessing to me, and I never see her without being the better for her company. I am treated in the family as if I was a near relation, and have been repeatedly invited to call upon them at all times. You know what a shy fellow I am; I cannot prevail with myself to make so much use of this privilege as I am sure they intend I should, but perhaps this awkwardness will wear off hereafter. It was my earnest request, before I left St. Alban's, that, wherever it might please Providence to dispose of me, I might meet with such an acquaintance as I find in Mrs. Unwin. How happy it is to believe with a steadfast assurance, that our petitions are heard, even while we are making them!—and how delightful to meet with a proof of it in the effectual and actual grant of them! Surely it is a gracious finishing given to those means which the Almighty has been pleased to make use of for my conversion. After having been deservedly rendered unfit for any society, to be again qualified for it, and admitted at once into the fellowship of those whom God regards as the excellent of the earth, and whom, in the emphatical language of Scripture, he preserves as the apple of his eye, is a blessing, which carries with it the stamp and visible

superscription of divine bounty—a grace unlimited as undeserved; and, like its glorious author, free in its course, and blessed in its operation!

My dear cousin! health and happiness, and, above all, the favour of our great and gracious Lord attend you! while we seek it in spirit and in truth we are infinitely more secure of it than of the next breath we expect to draw. Heaven and earth have their destined periods; ten thousand worlds will vanish at the consummation of all things; but the word of God standeth fast, and they who trust in him shall never be confounded.

My love to all who inquire after me.

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO MAJOR COWPER.

Huntingdon, Oct. 18, 1765.

My dear Major—I have neither lost the use of my fingers nor my memory, though my unaccountable silence might incline you to suspect that I had lost both. The history of those things which have, from time to time, prevented my scribbling would not only be insipid but extremely voluminous, for which reasons they will not make their appearance at present, nor probably at any time hereafter. If my neglecting to write to you were a proof that I had never thought of you, and that had been really the case, five shillings apiece would have been much too little to give for the sight of such a monster! but I am no such monster, nor do I perceive in

myself the least tendency to such a transformation. You may recollect that I had but very uncomfortable expectations of the accommodations I should meet with at Huntingdon. How much better is it to take our lot where it shall please Providence to cast it without anxiety! had I chosen for myself, it is impossible I could have fixed upon a place so agreeable to me in all respects. I so much dreaded the thought of having a new acquaintance to make, with no other recommendation than that of being a perfect stranger, that I heartily wished no creature here might take the least notice of me. Instead of which, in about two months after my arrival, I became known to all the visitable people here, and do verily think it the most agreeable neighbourhood I ever saw.

Here are three families who have received me with the utmost civility, and two in particular have treated me with as much cordiality as if their pedigree and mine had grown upon the same sheepskin. Besides these, there are three or four single men, who suit my temper to a hair. The town is one of the neatest in England; the country is fine for several miles about it; and the roads, which are all turnpike, and strike out four or five different ways, are perfectly good all the year round. I mention this latter circumstance chiefly because my distance from Cambridge has made a horseman of me at last, or at least is likely to do so. My brother and I meet every week, by an alternate reciprocation of intercourse, as Sam Johnson would express it; sometimes I get a lift in a neighbour's chaise, but

generally ride. As to my own personal condition, I am much happier than the day is long, and sunshine and candle-light alike see me perfectly contented. I get books in abundance, as much company as I choose, a deal of *comfortable leisure*, and enjoy better health, I think, than for many years past. What is there wanting to make me happy? Nothing, if I can but be as thankful as I ought, and I trust that He, who has bestowed so many blessings upon me, will give me gratitude to crown them all. I beg you will give my love to my dear cousin Maria, and to every body at the Park. If Mrs. Maitland is with you, as I suspect by a passage in Lady Hesketh's letter to me, pray remember me to her very affectionately. And believe me, my dear friend, ever yours,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

October 25, 1765.

Dear Joe—I am afraid the month of October has proved rather unfavourable to the belle assemblée at Southampton, high winds and continual rains being bitter enemies to that agreeable lounge which you and I are equally fond of. I have very cordially betaken myself to my books and my fireside; and seldom leave them unless for exercise. I have added another family to the number of those I was acquainted with when you were here. Their name is Unwin—the most agreeable people imaginable; quite sociable, and as free from the ceremonious

civility of country gentlefolks as any I ever met with. They treat me more like a near relation than a stranger, and their house is always open to me. The old gentleman carries me to Cambridge in his chaise. He is a man of learning and good sense, and as simple as Parson Adams. His wife has a very uncommon understanding, has read much, to excellent purpose, and is more polite than a duchess. The son, who belongs to Cambridge, is a most amiable young man, and the daughter quite of a piece with the rest of the family. They see but little company, which suits me exactly; go when I will, I find a house full of peace and cordiality in all its parts, and am sure to hear no scandal, but such discourse instead of it as we are all better for. You remember Rousseau's description of an English morning; such are the mornings I spend with these good people, and the evenings differ from them in nothing, except that they are still more snug and quieter. Now I know them, I wonder that I liked Huntingdon so well before I knew them, and am apt to think I should find every place disagreeable that had not an Unwin belonging to it.

This incident convinces me of the truth of an observation I have often made, that when we circumscribe our estimate of all that is clever within the limits of our own acquaintance (which I at least have been always apt to do) we are guilty of a very uncharitable censure upon the rest of the world, and of a narrowness of thinking disgraceful to ourselves. Wapping and Redriff

may contain some of the most amiable persons living, and such as one would go to Wapping and Redriff to make acquaintance with. You remember Gray's stanza,

> Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
> The deep unfathom'd caves of ocean bear,
> Full many a rose is born to blush unseen,
> And waste its fragrance on the desert air.

Yours. dear Joe,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Nov. 5, 1765.

Dear Joe—I wrote to you about ten days ago,

> Soliciting a quick return of gold,
> To purchase certain horse that likes me well.

Either my letter or your answer to it, I fear, has miscarried. The former, I hope; because a miscarriage of the latter might be attended with bad consequences.

I find it impossible to proceed any longer in my present course without danger of bankruptcy. I have therefore entered into an agreement with the Rev. Mr. Unwin to lodge and board with him. The family are the most agreeable in the world. They live in a special good house, and in a very genteel way. They are all exactly what I would wish them to be, and I know I shall be as happy with them as I can be on this side of the sun. I did not dream

* Private correspondence.

of this matter till about five days ago: but now the whole is settled. I shall transfer myself thither as soon as I have satisfied all demands upon me here.

Yours ever,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Nov. 8, 1765.

Dear Sephus,—Notwithstanding it is so agreeable a thing to read law lectures to the students of Lyons' Inn, especially to the reader himself, I must beg leave to wave it. Danby Pickering must be the happy man; and I heartily wish him joy of his deputyship. As to the treat, I think if it goes before the lecture, it will be apt to blunt the apprehension of the students; and, if it comes after, it may erase from their memories impressions so newly made. I could wish therefore, that, for their benefit and behoof, this circumstance were omitted. But, if it be absolutely necessary, I hope Mr. Salt, or whoever takes the conduct of it, will see that it be managed with the frugality and temperance becoming so learned a body. I shall be obliged to you if you will present my respects to Mr. Treasurer Salt, and express my concern at the same time that he had the trouble of sending me two letters upon this occasion. The first of them never came to hand.

I shall be obliged to you if you will tell me whether my exchequer is full or empty, and whether

* Private correspondence.

the revenue of last year is yet come in, that I may proportion my payments to the exigencies of my affairs.

My dear Sephus, give my love to your family, and believe me much obliged to you for your invitation. At present I am in such an unsettled condition, that I can think of nothing but laying the foundation of my future abode at Unwin's. My being admitted there is the effect of the great good-nature and friendly turn of that family, who, I have great reason to believe, are as desirous to do me service as they could be after a much longer acquaintance. Let your next, if it comes a week hence, be directed to me there.

The greatest part of the law books are those which Lord Cowper gave me. Those, and the very few which I bought myself, are all at the major's service.

Stroke Puss's back the wrong way, and it will put her in mind of her master.

Yours ever,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Huntingdon, March 6, 1766.

My dear Cousin—I have for some time past imputed your silence to the cause which you yourself assign for it, viz. to my change of situation: and was even sagacious enough to account for the frequency of your letters to me while I lived alone,

from your attention to me in a state of such solitude as seemed to make it an act of particular charity to write to me. I bless God for it, I was happy even then; solitude has nothing gloomy in it if the soul points upwards. St. Paul tells his Hebrew converts, "Ye are come (already come) to Mount Sion—to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant." When this is the case, as surely it was with them, or the Spirit of Truth had never spoken it, there is an end of the melancholy and dulness of life at once. You will not suspect me, my dear Cousin, of a design to understand this passage literally. But this however it certainly means, that a lively faith is able to anticipate, in some measure, the joys of that heavenly society which the soul shall actually possess hereafter.

Since I have changed my situation, I have found still greater cause of thanksgiving to the Father of all Mercies. The family with whom I live are Christians, and it has pleased the Almighty to bring me to the knowledge of them, that I may want no means of improvement in that temper and conduct which he is pleased to require in all his servants.

My dear Cousin, one half of the Christian world would call this madness, fanaticism, and folly: but are not these things warranted by the word of God, not only in the passages I have cited, but in many others? If we have no communion with God here, surely we can expect none hereafter. A faith that does not place our conversation in heaven; that

does not warm the heart and purify it too; that does not, in short, govern our thought, word, and deed, is no faith, nor will it obtain for us any spiritual blessing here or hereafter. Let us see therefore, my dear Cousin, that we do not deceive ourselves in a matter of such infinite moment. The world will be ever telling us that we are good enough, and the world will vilify us behind our backs. But it is not the world which tries the heart, that is the prerogative of God alone. My dear Cousin, I have often prayed for you behind your back, and now I pray for you to your face. There are many who would not forgive me this wrong, but I have known you so long and so well that I am not afraid of telling you how sincerely I wish for your growth in every Christian grace, in every thing that may promote and secure your everlasting welfare.

I am obliged to Mrs. Cowper for the book, which, you perceive, arrived safe. I am willing to consider it as an intimation on her part that she would wish me to write to her, and shall do it accordingly. My circumstances are rather particular, such as call upon my friends, those, I mean, who are truly such, to take some little notice of me, and will naturally make those who are not such in sincerity rather shy of doing it. To this I impute the silence of many with regard to me, who, before the affliction that befel me, were ready enough to converse with me.

Yours ever,

W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER.*

Huntingdon, March 11, 1766.

My dear Cousin—I am much obliged to you for Pearsall's Meditations, especially as it furnishes me with an occasion of writing to you, which is all I have waited for. My friends must excuse me if I write to none but those who lay it fairly in my way to do so. The inference I am apt to draw from their silence is, that they wish *me* to be silent too.

I have great reason, my dear Cousin, to be thankful to the gracious Providence that conducted me to this place. The lady, in whose house I live, is so excellent a person, and regards me with a friendship so truly Christian, that I could almost fancy my own mother restored to life again, to compensate to me for all the friends I have lost and all my connexions broken. She has a son at Cambridge in all respects worthy of such a mother, the most amiable young man I ever knew. His natural and acquired endowments are very considerable, and as to his virtues, I need only say that he is a Christian. It ought to be a matter of daily thanksgiving to me that I am admitted into the society of such persons, and I pray God to make me and keep me worthy of them.

Your brother Martin has been very kind to me, having written to me twice in a style which, though it was once irksome to me, to say the least, I now know how to value. I pray God to forgive me the many light things I have both said and thought of

* The wife of Major Cowper, and sister of the Rev. Martin Madan, minister of Lock Chapel.

him and his labours. Hereafter I shall consider him as a burning and a shining light, and as one of those who, having turned many to righteousness, shall shine hereafter as the stars for ever and ever.

So much for the state of my heart: as to my spirits, I am cheerful and happy, and, having peace with God, have peace with myself. For the continuance of this blessing I trust to Him who gives it, and they who trust in Him shall never be confounded.

Yours affectionately,
W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER.

Huntingdon, April 4, 1766.

My dear Cousin—I agree with you that letters are not essential to friendship, but they seem to be a natural fruit of it, when they are the only intercourse that can be had. And a friendship producing no sensible effects is so like indifference, that the appearance may easily deceive even an acute discerner. I retract however all that I said in my last upon this subject, having reason to suspect that it proceeded from a principle which I would discourage in myself upon all occasions, even a pride that felt itself hurt upon a mere suspicion of neglect. I have so much cause for humility, and so much need of it too, and every little sneaking resentment is such an enemy to it, that I hope I shall never give quarter to any thing that appears

in the shape of sullenness or self-consequence hereafter. Alas! if my best Friend, who laid down his life for me, were to remember all the instances in which I have neglected him, and to plead them against me in judgment, where should I hide my guilty head in the day of recompence? I will pray therefore for blessings upon my friends, though they cease to be so, and upon my enemies, though they continue such. The deceitfulness of the natural heart is inconceivable; I know well that I passed upon my friends for a person at least religiously inclined, if not actually religious, and, what is more wonderful, I thought myself a Christian, when I had no faith in Christ, when I saw no beauty in him that I should desire him; in short, when I had neither faith, nor love, nor any Christian grace whatever, but a thousand seeds of rebellion instead, evermore springing up in enmity against him. But blessed be God, even the God who is become my salvation, the hail of affliction and rebuke for sin has swept away the refuge of lies. It pleased the Almighty, in great mercy, to set all my misdeeds before me. At length, the storm being past, a quiet and peaceful serenity of soul succeeded, such as ever attends the gift of living faith in the all-sufficient atonement, and the sweet sense of mercy and pardon purchased by the blood of Christ. Thus did he break me and bind me up, thus did he wound me and his hands made me whole. My dear Cousin, I make no apology for entertaining you with the history of my conversion, because I know you to be a Christian in the sterling import of the ap-

pellation. This is however but a very summary account of the matter, neither would a letter contain the astonishing particulars of it. If we ever meet again in this world, I will relate them to you by word of mouth; if not, they will serve for the subject of a conference in the next, where I doubt not I shall remember and record them with a gratitude better suited to the subject.

Yours, my dear Cousin, affectionately,

W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER.

Huntingdon, April 17, 1766.

My dear Cousin—As in matters unattainable by reason and unrevealed in the Scripture, it is impossible to argue at all; so, in matters concerning which reason can only give a probable guess, and the Scripture has made no explicit discovery, it is, though not impossible to argue at all, yet impossible to argue to any certain conclusion. This seems to me to be the very case with the point in question —— reason is able to form many plausible conjectures concerning the possibility of our knowing each other in a future state, and the Scripture has, here and there, favoured us with an expression that looks at least like a slight intimation of it; but because a conjecture can never amount to a proof, and a slight intimation cannot be construed into a positive assertion, therefore, I think, we can never

come to any absolute conclusion upon the subject. We may, indeed, reason about the plausibility of our conjectures, and we may discuss, with great industry and shrewdness of argument, those passages in the Scripture which seem to favour the opinion; but still, no certain means having been afforded us, no certain end can be attained; and, after all that can be said, it will still be doubtful whether we shall know each other or not.

As to arguments founded upon human reason only, it would be easy to muster up a much greater number on the affirmative side of the question than it would be worth my while to write or yours to read. Let us see, therefore, what the Scripture says, or seems to say, towards the proof of it; and of this kind of argument also I shall insert but a few of those, which seem to me to be the fairest and clearest for the purpose. For, after all, a disputant on either side of this question is in danger of that censure of our blessed Lord's, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scripture, nor the power of God."

As to parables, I know it has been said in the dispute concerning the intermediate state that they are not argumentative; but, this having been controverted by very wise and good men, and the parable of Dives and Lazarus having been used by such to prove an intermediate state, I see not why it may not be as fairly used for the proof of any other matter which it seems fairly to imply. In this parable we see that Dives is represented as knowing Lazarus, and Abraham as knowing them

both, and the discourse between them is entirely concerning their respective characters and circumstances upon earth. Here, therefore, our Saviour seems to countenance the notion of a mutual knowledge and recollection, and, if a soul that has perished shall know the soul that is saved, surely the heirs of salvation shall know and recollect each other.

In the first epistle to the Thessalonians, the second chapter, and nineteenth verse, Saint Paul says, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and our joy."

As to the hope which the apostle had formed concerning them, he himself refers the accomplishment of it to the coming of Christ, meaning that then he should receive the recompence of his labours in their behalf; his joy and glory he refers likewise to the same period, both which would result from the sight of such numbers redeemed by the blessing of God upon his ministration, when he should present them before the great Judge, and say, in the words of a greater than himself, "Lo! I and the children whom thou hast given me." This seems to imply that the apostle should know the converts and the converts the apostle, at least at the day of judgment, and, if then, why not afterwards?

See also the fourth chapter of that epistle, verses 13, 14, 16, which I have not room to transcribe. Here the apostle comforts them under their afflic-

tion for their deceased brethren, exhorting them "not to sorrow as without hope;" and what is the hope, by which he teaches them to support their spirits? Even this, "That them which sleep in Jesus shall God bring with him." In other words, and by a fair paraphrase surely, telling them they are only taken from them for a season, and that they should receive them at their resurrection.

If you can take off the force of these texts, my dear Cousin, you will go a great way towards shaking my opinion: if not, I think they must go a great way towards shaking yours.

The reason why I did not send you my opinion of Pearsall was, because I had not then read him; I have read him since, and like him much, especially the latter part of him; but you have whetted my curiosity to see the last letter by tearing it out; unless you can give me a good reason why I should not see it, I shall inquire for the book the first time I go to Cambridge. Perhaps I may be partial to Hervey for the sake of his other writings, but I cannot give Pearsall the preference to him, for I think him one of the most scriptural writers in the world.

Yours,

W. C

TO MRS. COWPER.

Huntingdon, April 18, 1766.

My dear Cousin—Having gone as far as I thought needful to justify the opinion of our

meeting and knowing each other hereafter, I find upon reflection that I have done but half my business, and that one of the questions you proposed remains entirely unconsidered, viz. "Whether the things of our present state will not be of too low and mean a nature to engage our thoughts or make a part of our communications in heaven."

The common and ordinary occurrences of life, no doubt, and even the ties of kindred and of all temporal interests, will be entirely discarded from amongst that happy society, and possibly, even the remembrance of them done away. But it does not therefore follow that our spiritual concerns, even in this life, will be forgotten, neither do I think, that they can ever appear trifling to us, in any the most distant period of eternity. God, as you say, in reference to the Scripture, will be all in all. But does not that expression mean that, being admitted to so near an approach to our heavenly Father and Redeemer, our whole nature, the soul, and all its faculties, will be employed in praising and adoring him? Doubtless, however, this will be the case, and if so, will it not furnish out a glorious theme of thanksgiving to recollect "the rock whence we were hewn, and the hole of the pit whence we were digged?"—to recollect the time, when our faith, which, under the tuition and nurture of the Holy Spirit, has produced such a plentiful harvest of immortal bliss, was as a grain of mustard seed, small in itself, promising but little fruit, and producing less?—to recollect the various attempts that were made upon it, by the

world, the flesh, and the devil, and its various triumphs over all, by the assistance of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ! At present, whatever our convictions may be of the sinfulness and corruption of our nature, we can make but a very imperfect estimate either of our weakness or our guilt. Then, no doubt, we shall understand the full value of the wonderful salvation wrought out for us: and it seems reasonable to suppose that, in order to form a just idea of our redemption, we shall be able to form a just one of the danger we have escaped; when we know how weak and frail we were, surely we shall be more able to render due praise and honour to his strength who fought for us; when we know completely the hatefulness of sin in the sight of God, and how deeply we were tainted by it, we shall know how to value the blood by which we were cleansed as we ought. The twenty-four elders, in the fifth of the Revelations, give glory to God for their redemption out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. This surely implies a retrospect to their respective conditions upon earth, and that each remembered out of what particular kindred and nation he had been redeemed, and, if so, then surely the minutest circumstance of their redemption did not escape their memory. They who triumph over the Beast, in the fifteenth chapter, sing the song of Moses, the servant of God; and what was that song? A sublime record of Israel's deliverance and the destruction of her enemies in the Red Sea, typical, no doubt, of the song,

which the redeemed in Sion shall sing to celebrate their own salvation and the defeat of their spiritual enemies. This again implies a recollection of the dangers they had before encountered, and the supplies of strength and ardour they had, in every emergency, received from the great deliverer out of all. These quotations do not, indeed, prove that their warfare upon earth includes a part of their converse with each other; but they prove that it is a theme not unworthy to be heard, even before the throne of God, and therefore it cannot be unfit for reciprocal communication.

But you doubt whether there is *any* communication between the blessed at all, neither do I recollect any Scripture that proves it, or that bears any relation to the subject. But reason seems to require it so peremptorily, that a society without social intercourse seems to be a solecism and a contradiction in terms, and the inhabitants of those regions are called, you know, in Scripture, an innumerable *company*, and an *assembly*, which seems to convey the idea of society as clearly as the word itself. Human testimony weighs but little in matters of this sort, but let it have all the weight it can. I know no greater names in divinity than Watts and Doddridge: they were both of this opinion, and I send you the words of the latter.

"Our *companions in glory* may probably assist us by their wise and good observations, when we come to make the *providence of God* here upon earth, under the guidance and direction of our Lord Jesus Christ, the *subject of our mutual converse*."

Thus, my dear Cousin, I have spread out my reasons before you for an opinion, which, whether admitted or denied, affects not the state or interest of our soul. May our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, conduct us into his own Jerusalem, where there shall be no night, neither any darkness at all, where we shall be free, even from innocent error, and perfect in the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Yours faithfully,

W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER.

Huntingdon, Sept, 3, 1766.

My dear Cousin—It is reckoned, you know, a great achievement to silence an opponent in disputation, and your silence was of so long a continuance, that I might well begin to please myself with the apprehension of having accomplished so arduous a matter. To be serious, however, I am not sorry that what I have said concerning our knowledge of each other in a future state has a little inclined you to the affirmative. For though the redeemed of the Lord shall be sure of being as happy in that state as infinite power employed by infinite goodness can make them, and therefore it may seem immaterial whether we shall, or shall not, recollect each other hereafter; yet our present happiness at least is a little interested in the question. A parent, a friend, a wife, must needs, I think, feel a little heart-ache at the thought of an eternal separation

from the objects of her regard: and not to know them when she meets them in another life, or never to meet them at all, amounts, though not altogether, yet nearly to the same thing. Remember them, I think, she needs must. To hear that they are happy, will indeed be no small addition to her own felicity; but to see them so will surely be a greater. Thus, at least, it appears to our present human apprehension; consequently, therefore, to think that, when we leave them, we lose them for ever, that we must remain eternally ignorant whether they that were flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone, partake with us of celestial glory, or are disinherited of their heavenly portion, must shed a dismal gloom over all our present connexions. For my own part, this life is such a momentary thing, and all its interests have so shrunk in my estimation, since, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, I became attentive to the things of another; that, like a worm in the bud of all my friendships and affections, this very thought would eat out the heart of them all had I a thousand; and were their date to terminate with this life, I think I should have no inclination to cultivate and improve such a fugitive business. Yet friendship is necessary to our happiness here, and, built upon christian principles, upon which only it can stand, is a thing even of religious sanction—for what is that love which the Holy Spirit, speaking by St. John, so much inculcates, but friendship?—the only love which deserves the name—a love which can toil, and watch, and deny itself, and go to death

for its brother. Worldly friendships are a poor weed compared with this, and even this union of spirit in the bond of peace would suffer, in my mind at least, could I think it were only coeval with our earthly mansions. It may possibly argue great weakness in me, in this instance, to stand so much in need of future hopes to support me in the discharge of present duty. But so it is: I am far, I know, very far, from being perfect in Christian love or any other divine attainment, and am therefore unwilling to forego whatever may help me in my progress.

You are so kind as to inquire after my health, for which reason I must tell you, what otherwise would not be worth mentioning, that I have lately been just enough indisposed to convince me that not only human life in general, but mine in particular, hangs by a slender thread. I am stout enough in appearance, yet a little illness demolishes me. I have had a severe shake, and the building is not so firm as it was. But I bless God for it, with all my heart. If the inner man be but strengthened, day by day, as I hope, under the renewing influences of the Holy Ghost, it will be no matter how soon the outward is dissolved. He who has, in a manner, raised me from the dead, in a literal sense, has given me the grace, I trust, to be ready at the shortest notice to surrender up to him that life which I have twice received from him. Whether I live or die, I desire it may be to his glory, and it must be to my happiness. I thank God that I have those amongst my kindred to whom I can

write, without reserve, my sentiments upon this subject, as I do to you. A letter upon any other subject is more insipid to me than ever my task was when a school-boy, and I say not this in vain-glory, God forbid! but to show you what the Almighty, whose name I am unworthy to mention, has done for me, the chief of sinners. Once he was a terror to me, and his service, O what a weariness it was! Now I can say, I love him and his holy name, and am never so happy as when I speak of his mercies to me.

Yours, dear Cousin,

W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER.

Huntingdon, Oct. 20, 1766.

My dear Cousin—I am very sorry for poor Charles's illness, and hope you will soon have cause to thank God for his complete recovery. We have an epidemical fever in this country likewise, which leaves behind it a continual sighing, almost to suffocation: not that I have seen any instance of it, for, blessed be God! our family have hitherto escaped it, but such was the account I heard of it this morning.

I am obliged to you for the interest you take in my welfare, and for your inquiring so particularly after the manner in which my time passes here. As to amusements, I mean what the world calls such, we have none: the place indeed swarms with them; and cards and dancing are the professed

business of almost all the *gentle* inhabitants of Huntingdon. We refuse to take part in them, or to be accessaries to this way of murdering our time, and by so doing have acquired the name of Methodists. Having told you how we *do not* spend our time, I will next say how we do. We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven, we read either the Scripture, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries; at eleven, we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day; and from twelve to three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval I either read in my own apartment, or walk, or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but if the weather permits adjourn to the garden, where, with Mrs. Unwin and her son, I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and, by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord, make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short, we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church-time and dinner. At night we read and converse, as before, till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or a sermon; and, last of all, the family are called to prayers. I need not tell *you* that such a

life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly, we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and I have something very like a filial one for her, and her son and I are brothers. Blessed be the God of our salvation for such companions, and for such a life, above all for a heart to like it!

I have had many anxious thoughts about taking orders, and I believe every new convert is apt to think himself called upon for that purpose; but it has pleased God, by means which there is no need to particularize, to give me full satisfaction as to the propriety of declining it; indeed, they who have the least idea of what I have suffered from the dread of public exhibitions will readily excuse my never attempting them hereafter. In the mean time, if it please the Almighty, I may be an instrument of turning many to the truth, in a private way, and hope that my endeavours in this way have not been entirely unsuccessful. Had I the zeal of Moses, I should want an Aaron to be my spokesman.

Yours ever, my dear Cousin,

W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER.

Huntingdon, March 11, 1767.

My dear Cousin—To find those whom I love, clearly and strongly persuaded of evangelical truth, gives me a pleasure superior to any this world can afford me. Judge then, whether your letter, in

which the body and substance of a saving faith is so evidently set forth, could meet with a lukewarm reception at my hands, or be entertained with indifference! Would you know the true reason of my long silence? Conscious that my religious principles are generally excepted against, and that the conduct they produce, wherever they are heartily maintained, is still more the object of disapprobation than those principles themselves, and remembering that I had made both the one and the other known to you, without having any clear assurance that our faith in Jesus was of the same stamp and character, I could not help thinking it possible that you might disapprove both my sentiments and practice; that you might think the one unsupported by Scripture, and the other whimsical, and unnecessarily strict and rigorous, and consequently would be rather pleased with the suspension of a correspondence, which a different way of thinking upon so momentous a subject as that we wrote upon was likely to render tedious and irksome to you.

I have told you the truth from my heart; forgive me these injurious suspicions, and never imagine that I shall hear from you upon this delightful theme without a real joy, or without prayer to God to prosper you in the way of his truth, his sanctifying and saving truth. The book you mention lies now upon my table. Marshall is an old acquaintance of mine; I have both read him and heard him read, with pleasure and edification. The doctrines he maintains are, under the

influence of the Spirit of Christ, the very life of my soul, and the soul of all my happiness; that Jesus is a *present* Saviour from the guilt of sin, by his most precious blood, and from the power of it by his Spirit; that, corrupt and wretched in ourselves, in Him, and in *Him only*, we are complete; that being united to Jesus by a lively faith, we have a solid and eternal interest in his obedience and sufferings to justify us before the face of our heavenly Father, and that all this inestimable treasure, the earnest of which is in grace, and its consummation in glory, is given, freely *given*, to us of God; in short, that he hath opened the kingdom of heaven *to all believers*. These are the truths which, by the grace of God, shall ever be dearer to me than life itself; shall ever be placed next my heart, as the throne whereon the Saviour himself shall sit, to sway all its motions, and reduce that world of iniquity and rebellion to a state of filial and affectionate obedience to the will of the most Holy.

These, my dear Cousin, are the truths to which by nature we are enemies—they debase the sinner, and exalt the Saviour, to a degree which the pride of our hearts (till Almighty grace subdues them) is determined never to allow. May the Almighty reveal his Son in our hearts, continually more and more, and teach us to increase in love towards him continually, for having *given* us the unspeakable riches of Christ.

Yours faithfully,

W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER.

March 14, 1767.

My dear Cousin—I just add a line, by way of postscript to my last, to apprize you of the arrival of a very dear friend of mine at the Park, on Friday next, the son of Mr. Unwin, whom I have desired to call on you in his way from London to Huntingdon. If you knew him as well as I do, you would love him as much. But I leave the young man to speak for himself, which he is very able to do. He is ready possessed of an answer to every question you can possibly ask concerning me, and knows my *whole story* from first to last. I give you this previous notice, because I know you are not fond of strange faces, and because I thought it would, in some degree, save him the pain of announcing himself.

I am become a great florist and shrub-doctor. If the Major can make up a small packet of seeds, that will make a figure in a garden, where we have little else besides jessamine and honeysuckle; such a packet I mean as may be put into one's fob, I will promise to take great care of them, as I ought to value natives of the Park. They must not be such, however, as require great skill in the management, for at present I have no skill to spare.

I think Marshall one of the best writers, and the most spiritual expositor of Scripture I ever read. I admire the strength of his argument, and the clearness of his reasonings, upon those parts of our most holy religion which are generally least un-

derstood (even by real Christians) as master-pieces of the kind. His section upon the union of the soul with Christ is an instance of what I mean, in which he has spoken of a most mysterious truth, with admirable perspicuity and with great good sense, making it all the while subservient to his main purport, of proving holiness to be the fruit and effect of faith.

I subjoin thus much upon that author, because, though you desired my opinion of him, I remember that in my last I rather left you to find it out by inference than expressed it, as I ought to have done. I never met with a man who understood the plan of salvation better, or was more happy in explaining it.

W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER.

Huntingdon, April 3, 1767.

My dear Cousin—You sent my friend Unwin home to us charmed with your kind reception of him, and with every thing he saw at the Park. Shall I once more give you a peep into my vile and deceitful heart? What motive do you think lay at the bottom of my conduct, when I desired him to call upon you? I did not suspect, at first, that pride and vainglory had any share in it, but quickly after I had recommended the visit to him, I discovered in that fruitful soil the very root of the matter. You know I am a stranger here; all such are suspected characters; unless they bring their

credentials with them. To this moment, I believe, it is matter of speculation in the place, whence I came and to whom I belong.

Though my friend, you may suppose, before I was admitted an inmate here, was satisfied that I was not a mere vagabond, and has, since that time, received more convincing proofs of my *sponsibility*, yet I could not resist the opportunity of furnishing him with ocular demonstration of it, by introducing him to one of my most splendid connexions; that when he hears me called, "*That fellow Cowper*," which has happened heretofore, he may be able, upon unquestionable evidence, to assert my gentlemanhood, and relieve me from the weight of that opprobrious appellation. O Pride! Pride! it deceives with the subtlety of a serpent, and seems to walk erect, though it crawls upon the earth. How will it twist and twine itself about, to get from under the cross, which it is the glory of our Christian calling to be able to bear with patience and good will! They who can guess at the heart of a stranger, and you especially, who are of a compassionate temper, will be more ready, perhaps, to excuse me, in this instance, than I can be to excuse myself. But, in good truth, it was abominable pride of heart, indignation, and vanity, and deserves no better name. How should such a creature be admitted into those pure and sinless mansions, where nothing shall enter that defileth, did not the blood of Christ, applied by the hand of faith, take away the guilt of sin, and leave no spot or stain behind it! Oh what continual need have I of an Almighty, All-sufficient

Saviour! I am glad you are acquainted so *particularly* with *all* the circumstances of my story, for I know that your secrecy and discretion may be trusted with any thing. A thread of mercy ran through all the intricate maze of those afflictive providences, so mysterious to myself at the time, and which must ever remain so to all, who will not see what was the great design of them; at the judgment-seat of Christ the whole shall be laid open. How is the rod of iron changed into a sceptre of love!

I thank you for the seeds; I have committed some of each sort to the ground, whence they will spring up like so many mementoes to remind me of my friends at the Park.

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

June 16, 1767.

Dear Joe—This part of the world is not productive of much news, unless the coldness of the weather be so, which is excessive for the season. We expect, or rather experience a warm contest between the candidates for the county; the preliminary movements of bribery, threatening, and drunkenness, being already taken. The Sandwich interest seems to shake, though both parties are very sanguine. Lord Carysfort is supposed to be in great jeopardy, though as yet, I imagine, a clear

* Private Correspondence.

judgment cannot be formed; for a man may have all the noise on his side and yet lose his election. You know me to be an uninterested person, and I am sure I am a very ignorant one in things of this kind. I only wish it was over, for it occasions the most detestable scene of profligacy and riot that can be imagined.

Yours ever,

W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER.

Huntingdon, July 13, 1767.

My dear Cousin—The newspaper has told you the truth. Poor Mr. Unwin, being flung from his horse as he was going to his church on Sunday morning, received a dreadful fracture on the back part of the scull, under which he languished till Thursday evening, and then died. This awful dispensation has left an impression upon our spirits, which will not be presently worn off. He died in a poor cottage, to which he was carried immediately after his fall, about a mile from home, and his body could not be brought to his house till the spirit was gone to him who gave it. May it be a lesson to us to watch, since we know not the day, nor the hour, when our Lord cometh!

The effect of it upon my circumstances will only be a change of the place of my abode. For I shall still, by God's leave, continue with Mrs. Unwin, whose behaviour to me has always been that of a

mother to a son. We know not where we shall settle, but we trust that the Lord, whom we seek, will go before us and prepare a rest for us. We have employed our friend Haweis, Dr. Conyers, of Helmsley, in Yorkshire, and Mr. Newton of Olney, to look out a place for us, but at present are entirely ignorant under which of the three we shall settle, or whether under either. I have written to my aunt Madan, to desire Martin to assist us with his inquiries. It is probable we shall stay here till Michaelmas.

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

July 16, 1767.

Dear Joe—Your wishes that the newspaper may have misinformed you are vain. Mr. Unwin is dead, and died in the manner there mentioned. At nine o'clock on Sunday morning he was in perfect health, and as likely to live twenty years as either of us, and before ten was stretched speechless and senseless upon a flock bed, in a poor cottage, where (it being impossible to remove him) he died on Thursday evening. I heard his dying groans, the effect of great agony, for he was a strong man, and much convulsed in his last moments. The few short intervals of sense that were indulged him he spent in earnest prayer, and in expressions of a firm trust and confidence in the only Saviour. To that stronghold we must all

resort at last, if we would have hope in our death; when every other refuge fails, we are glad to fly to the only shelter to which we can repair to any purpose; and happy is it for us, when, the false ground we have chosen for ourselves being broken under us, we find ourselves obliged to have recourse to the rock which can never be shaken: when this is our lot, we receive great and undeserved mercy.

Our society will not break up, but we shall settle in some other place, where, is at present uncertain.

Yours,

W. C.

These tender and confidential letters describe, in the clearest light, the singularly peaceful and devout life of this amiable writer, during his residence at Huntingdon, and the melancholy accident which occasioned his removal to a distant county. Time and providential circumstances now introduced to the notice of Cowper, the zealous and venerable friend, who became his intimate associate for many years, after having advised and assisted him in the important concern of fixing his future residence. The Rev. John Newton, then curate of Olney, in Buckinghamshire, had been requested by the late Dr. Conyers (who in taking his degree in divinity at Cambridge, had formed a friendship with young Mr. Unwin, and learned from him the religious character of his mother) to seize an opportunity, as he was passing through Huntingdon, of

making a visit to that exemplary lady. This visit, (so important in its consequences to the future history of Cowper,) happened to take place within a few days after the calamitous death of Mr. Unwin. As a change of scene appeared desirable both to Mrs. Unwin and to the interesting recluse whom she had generously requested to continue under her care, Mr. Newton offered to assist them in removing to the pleasant and picturesque county in which he resided. They were willing to enter into the flock of a pious and devoted pastor, whose ideas were so much in harmony with their own. He engaged for them a house at Olney, where they arrived on the 14th of October, 1767. He thus alludes to his new residence in the following extract of a letter to Mr. Hill.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, October 20, 1767.

I have no map to consult at present, but, by what remembrance I have of the situation of this place in the last I saw, it lies at the northernmost point of the county. We are just five miles beyond Newport Pagnell. I am willing to suspect that you make this inquiry with a *view* to an *interview*, when time shall serve. We may possibly be settled in our own house in about a month, where so good a friend of mine will be extremely welcome to Mrs. Unwin. We shall have a bed and a warm

* Private Correspondence.

fire-side at your service, if you can come before next summer; and if not, a parlour that looks the north wind full in the face, where you may be as cool as in the groves of Valombrosa.

Yours, my dear Sephus,
affectionately ever,
W. C.

It would have been difficult to select a situation apparently more suited to the existing circumstances and character of Cowper than the scene to which he was now transferred. In Mr. Newton were happily united the qualifications of piety, fervent, rational and cheerful—the kind and affectionate feelings that inspire friendship and regard—a solid judgment, and a refined taste—the power to edify and please, and the grace that knows how to improve it to the highest ends. He lived in the midst of a flock who loved and esteemed him, and who saw in his ministrations the credentials of heaven, and in his life the exemplification of the doctrines that he taught.

The time of Cowper, in his new situation, seems to have been chiefly devoted to religious contemplation, to social prayer, and to active charity. To this first of Christian virtues, his heart was eminently inclined, and Providence very graciously enabled him to exercise and enjoy it to an extent far superior to what his own scanty fortune allowed means. The death of his father, 1756, failed to place him in a state of independence, and the singular cast of his own mind was such, that nature seemed

to have rendered it impossible for him either to covet or to acquire riches. His happy exemption from worldly passions is forcibly displayed in the following letter.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, June 16, 1768.

Dear Joe—I thank you for so full an answer to so empty an epistle. If Olney furnished any thing for your amusement, you should have it in return, but occurrences here are as scarce as cucumbers at Christmas.

I visited St. Alban's about a fortnight since in person, and I visit it every day in thought. The recollection of what passed there, and the consequences that followed it, fill my mind continually, and make the circumstances of a poor, transient, half-spent life, so insipid, and unaffecting, that I have no heart to think or write much about them. Whether the nation is worshipping Mr. Wilkes, or any other idol, is of little moment to one who hopes and believes that he shall shortly stand in the presence of the great and blessed God. I thank him, that he has given me such a deep, impressed, persuasion of this awful truth as a thousand worlds would not purchase from me. It gives me a relish to every blessing, and makes every trouble light.

Affectionately yours

W. C.

In entering on the correspondence of the ensuing year, we find the following impressive letter addressed to Mr. Hill.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, Jan. 21, 1769.

Dear Joe—I rejoice with you in your recovery, and that you have escaped from the hands of one from whose hands you will not always escape. Death is either the most formidable, or the most comfortable thing we have in prospect, on this side of eternity. To be brought near to him, and to discern neither of these features in his face, would argue a degree of insensibility, of which I will not suspect my friend, whom I know to be a thinking man. You have been brought down to the side of the grave, and you have been raised again by Him who has the keys of the invisible world; who opens and none can shut, who shuts and none can open. I do not forget to return thanks to Him on your behalf, and to pray that your life, which He has spared, may be devoted to his service. "Behold! I stand at the door and knock," is the word of Him, on whom both our mortal and immortal life depend, and, blessed be his name, it is the word of one who wounds only that He may heal, and who waits to be gracious. The language of every such dispensation is "Prepare to meet thy God." It speaks with the voice of mercy and goodness, for, without such notices, whatever preparation we might make

* Private Correspondence.

for other events, we should make none for this. My dear friend, I desire and pray that, when this last enemy shall come to execute an *unlimited* commission upon us, we may be found ready, being established and rooted in a well-grounded faith in his name, who conquered and triumphed over him upon his cross.

Yours ever,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, January 29, 1769.

My dear Joe—I have a moment to spare, to tell you that your letter is just come to hand, and to thank you for it. I do assure you, the gentleness and candour of your manner engages my affection to you very much. You answer with mildness to an admonition, which would have provoked many to anger. I have not time to add more, except just to hint that, if I am ever enabled to look forward to death with comfort, which, I thank God, is sometimes the case with me, I do not take my view of it from the top of my own works and deservings, though God is witness that the labour of my life is to keep a conscience void of offence towards Him. He is always formidable to me, but when I see him disarmed of his sting, by having sheathed it in the body of Christ Jesus.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

* Private Correspondence.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, July 31, 1769.

Dear Joe—Sir Thomas crosses the Alps, and Sir Cowper, for that is his title at Olney, prefers his home to any other spot of earth in the world. Horace, observing this difference of temper in different persons, cried out a good many years ago, in the true spirit of poetry, "How much one man differs from another!" This does not seem a very sublime exclamation in English, but I remember we were taught to admire it in the original.

My dear friend, I am obliged to you for your invitation: but, being long accustomed to retirement, which I was always fond of, I am now more than ever unwilling to revisit those noisy and crowded scenes, which I never loved, and which I now abhor. I remember you with all the friendship I ever professed, which is as much as ever I entertained for any man. But the strange and uncommon incidents of my life have given an entire new turn to my whole character and conduct, and rendered me incapable of receiving pleasure from the same employments and amusements of which I could readily partake in former days.

I love you and yours, I thank you for your continued remembrance of me, and shall not cease to be their and your

Affectionate friend and servant,

W. C.

Cowper's present retirement was distinguished by

many private acts of beneficence, and his exemplary virtue was such that the opulent sometimes delighted to make him their almoner. In his sequestered life at Olney, he ministered abundantly to the wants of the poor, from a fund with which he was supplied by that model of extensive and unostentatious philanthropy, the late John Thornton, Esq., whose name he has immortalized in his Poem on Charity, still honouring his memory by an additional tribute to his virtues in the following descriptive eulogy, written immediately on his decease, in the year 1790.

Poets attempt the noblest task they can,
Praising the Author of all Good in man;
And next commemorating worthies lost,
The dead, in whom that good abounded most.

Thee therefore of commercial fame, but more
Fam'd for thy probity, from shore to shore—
Thee, Thornton, worthy in some page to shine
As honest, and more eloquent than mine,
I mourn; or, since thrice happy thou must be,
The world, no longer thy abode, not thee;
Thee to deplore were grief misspent indeed;
It were to weep that goodness has its meed,
That there is bliss prepared in yonder sky,
And glory for the virtuous when they die.

What pleasure can the miser's fondled hoard
Or spendthrift's prodigal excess afford,
Sweet as the privilege of healing woe
Suffer'd by virtue combating below!
That privilege was thine; Heaven gave thee means
To illumine with delight the saddest scenes,
Till thy appearance chased the gloom, forlorn
As midnight, and despairing of a morn.

Thou hadst an industry in doing good,
Restless as his who toils and sweats for food.
Av'rice in thee was the desire of wealth
By rust unperishable, or by stealth.
And, if the genuine worth of gold depend
On application to its noblest end,
Thine had a value in the scales of heaven,
Surpassing all that mine or mint have given:
And tho' God made thee of a nature prone
To distribution, boundless of thy own;
And still, by motives of religious force,
Impell'd thee more to that heroic course;
Yet was thy liberality discreet,
Nice in its choice, and of a temp'rate heat;
And, though in act unwearied, secret still,
As, in some solitude, the summer rill
Refreshes, where it winds, the faded green,
And cheers the drooping flowers, unheard, unseen.

Such was thy charity; no sudden start,
After long sleep of passion in the heart,
But steadfast principle, and in its kind
Of close alliance with th' eternal mind;
Trac'd easily to its true source above,
To Him, whose works bespeak his nature, love.
Thy bounties all were Christian, and I make
This record of thee for the Gospel's sake;
That the incredulous themselves may see
Its use and power exemplified in thee.

This simple and sublime eulogy was a just tribute of respect to the memory of this distinguished philanthropist; and, among the happiest actions of this truly liberal man, we may reckon his furnishing to a character so reserved and so retired as Cowper the means of enjoying the gratification of active and costly beneficence; a gratification in which the sequestered poet had delighted to indulge, before

his acquaintance with Mr. Newton afforded him an opportunity of being concerned in distributing the private, yet extensive, bounty of an opulent and exemplary merchant.

Cowper, before he quitted St. Alban's, assumed the charge of a necessitous child, to extricate him from the perils of being educated by very profligate parents; he sent him to a school at Huntingdon, transferred him, on his own removal, to Olney, and finally settled him as an apprentice at Oundle, in Northamptonshire.

The warm, benevolent, and cheerful piety of Mr. Newton, induced his friend Cowper to participate so abundantly in his parochial plans and engagements, that the poet's time and thoughts were more and more engrossed by devotional objects. He became a valuable auxiliary to a faithful parish priest, superintended the religious exercises of the poor, and engaged in an important undertaking, to which we shall shortly have occasion to advert.

But in the midst of these pious duties he forgot not his distant friends, and particularly his amiable relation and correspondent, of the Park-house, near Hertford. The following letter to that lady has no date, but it was probably written soon after his establishment at Olney. The remarkable memento in the postscript was undoubtedly introduced to counteract an idle rumour, arising from the circumstance of his having settled himself under the roof of a female friend, whose age and whose virtues he considered to be sufficient securities to ensure her reputation as well as his own.

TO MRS. COWPER.

My dear Cousin—I have not been behindhand in reproaching myself with neglect, but desire to take shame to myself for my unprofitableness in this, as well as in all other respects. I take the next immediate opportunity, however, of thanking you for yours, and of assuring you that, instead of being surprised at your silence, I rather wonder that you or any of my friends have any room left for so careless and negligent a correspondent in your memories. I am obliged to you for the intelligence you send me of my kindred, and rejoice to hear of their welfare. He who settles the bounds of our habitations has at length cast our lot at a great distance from each other, but I do not therefore forget their former kindness to me, or cease to be interested in their well being. You live in the centre of a world I know you do not delight in. Happy are you, my dear friend, in being able to discern the insufficiency of all it can afford to fill and satisfy the desires of an immortal soul. That God who created us for the enjoyment of himself, has determined in mercy that it shall fail us here, in order that the blessed result of all our inquiries after happiness in the creature may be a warm pursuit and a close attachment to our true interests, in fellowship and communion with Him, through the name and mediation of a dear Redeemer. I bless his goodness and grace that I have any reason to hope I am a partaker with you in the desire after better things

than are to be found in a world polluted with sin; and therefore devoted to destruction. May He enable us both to consider our present life in its only true light, as an opportunity put into our hands to glorify him amongst men by a conduct suited to his word and will. I am miserably defective in this holy and blessed art, but I hope there is at the bottom of all my sinful infirmities a sincere desire to live just so long as I may be enabled, in some poor measure, to answer the end of my existence in this respect, and then to obey the summons and attend him in a world where they who are his servants here shall pay him an unsinful obedience for ever. Your dear mother is too good to me, and puts a more charitable construction upon my silence than the fact will warrant. I am not better employed than I should be in corresponding with her. I have that within which hinders me wretchedly in every thing that I ought to do, and is prone to trifle and let time and every good thing run to waste. I hope however to write to her soon.

My love and best wishes attend Mr. Cowper, and all that inquire after me. May God be with you, to bless you and to do you good by all his dispensations; do not forget me when you are speaking to our best Friend before his mercy seat.

Yours ever,

W. C.

N. B. *I am not married.*

In the year 1769, the lady to whom the preceding letters are addressed was involved in domestic

affliction; and the following, which the poet wrote to her on the occasion, is so full of genuine piety and true pathos, that it would be an injury to his memory to suppress it.

TO MRS. COWPER.

Olney, Aug. 31, 1769.

My dear Cousin—A letter from your brother Frederic brought me yesterday the most afflicting intelligence that has reached me these many years. I pray to God to comfort you, and to enable you to sustain this heavy stroke with that resignation to his will which none but Himself can give, and which he gives to none but his own children. How blessed and happy is your lot, my dear friend, beyond the common lot of the greater part of mankind; that you know what it is to draw near to God in prayer, and are acquainted with a throne of grace! You have resources in the infinite love of a dear Redeemer which are withheld from millions: and the promises of God, which are yea and amen in Jesus, are sufficient to answer all your necessities, and to sweeten the bitterest cup which your heavenly Father will ever put into your hand. May He now give you liberty to drink at these wells of salvation, till you are filled with consolation and peace in the midst of trouble. He has said, "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee."* You have need of such a word as this, and he knows your need of it, and the time of necessity is the

* Isaiah xliii. 2.

time when he will be sure to appear in behalf of those who trust in him. I bear you and yours upon my heart before him night and day, for I never expect to hear of distress which shall call upon me with a louder voice to pray for the sufferer. I know the Lord hears me for myself, vile and sinful as I am, and believe, and am sure, that he will hear me for you also. He is the friend of the widow, and the father of the fatherless, even God in his holy habitation; in all our afflictions he is afflicted, and chastens us in mercy. Surely he will sanctify this dispensation to you, do you great and everlasting good by it, make the world appear like dust and vanity in your sight, as it truly is, and open to your view the glories of a better country, where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor pain; but God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes for ever. Oh that comfortable word! "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction;"* so that our very sorrows are evidences of our calling, and he chastens us because we are his children

My dear cousin, I commit you to the word of his grace, and to the comforts of his holy Spirit. Your life is needful for your family: May God, in mercy to them, prolong it, and may he preserve you from the dangerous effects which a stroke like this might have upon a frame so tender as yours. I grieve with you, I pray for you; could I do more I would, but God must comfort you.

Yours, in our dear Lord Jesus,

W. C.

* Isaiah xlviii. 10

In the following year the tender feelings of Cowper were called forth by family affliction that pressed more immediately on himself; he was hurried to Cambridge by the dangerous illness of his brother, then residing as a fellow in Bennet College. An affection truly fraternal had ever subsisted between the brothers, and the reader will recollect what the poet has said, in one of his letters, concerning their social intercourse while he resided at Huntingdon.

In the two first years of his residence at Olney, he had been repeatedly visited by Mr. John Cowper, and how cordially he returned that kindness and attention the following letter will testify, which was probably written in the chamber of the invalid.

TO MRS. COWPER.

March 5, 1770.

My brother continues much as he was. His case is a very dangerous one—an imposthume of the liver, attended by an asthma and dropsy. The physician has little hope of his recovery, I believe I might say none at all, only, being a friend, he does not formally give him over by ceasing to visit him, lest it should sink his spirits. For my own part, I have no expectation of his recovery, except by a signal interposition of Providence in answer to prayer. His case is clearly beyond the reach of medicine; but I have seen many a sickness healed, where the danger has been equally threatening, by

the only Physician of value. I doubt not he will have an interest in your prayers, as he has in the prayers of many. May the Lord incline his ear and give an answer of peace. I know it is good to be afflicted. I trust that you have found it so, and that under the teaching of God's own Spirit we shall both be purified. It is the desire of my soul to seek a better country, where God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of his people; and where, looking back upon the ways by which he has led us, we shall be filled with everlasting wonder, love, and praise.

I must add no more.

Yours ever,

W. C.

The sickness and death of his learned, pious, and affectionate brother, made a very strong impression on the tender heart and mind of Cowper—an impression so strong, that it induced him to write a narrative of the remarkable circumstances which occurred at the time. He sent a copy of this narrative to Mr. Newton. The paper is curious in every point of view, and so likely to awaken sentiments of piety in minds where it may be most desirable to have them awakened, that Mr. Newton subsequently communicated it to the public.*

Here it is necessary to introduce a brief account of the interesting person whom the poet regarded so tenderly. John Cowper was born in 1737. Being designed for the church, he was privately

* For this interesting document, see vol. v. p. 325.

educated by a clergyman, and became eminent for the extent and variety of his erudition in the university of Cambridge. The remarkable change in his views and principles is copiously displayed by his brother, in recording the pious close of his life Bennet College, of which he was a fellow, was his usual residence, and it became the scene of his death, on the 20th of March, 1770. Fraternal affection has executed a perfectly just and graceful description of his character, both in prose and verse. We transcribe both as highly honourable to these exemplary brethren, who may indeed be said to have dwelt together in unity.

"He was a man" (says the poet in speaking of his deceased brother) "of a most candid and ingenuous spirit; his temper remarkably sweet, and in his behaviour to me he had always manifested an uncommon affection. His outward conduct, so far as it fell under my notice, or I could learn it by the report of others, was perfectly decent and unblamable. There was nothing vicious in any part of his practice, but, being of a studious, thoughtful turn, he placed his chief delight in the acquisition of learning, and made such proficiency in it, that he had but few rivals in that of a classical kind. He was critically skilled in the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages; was beginning to make himself master of the Syriac, and perfectly understood the French and Italian, the latter of which he could speak fluently. Learned however as he was, he was easy and cheerful in his conversation, and en-

tirely free from the stiffness which is generally contracted by men devoted to such pursuits."

> "I had a brother once:
> Peace to the memory of a man of worth!
> A man of letters, and of manners too!
> Of manners sweet, as virtue always wears,
> When gay good humour dresses her in smiles!
> He grac'd a college, in which order yet
> Was sacred, and was honoured, lov'd, and wept
> By more than one, themselves conspicuous there!"

Another interesting tribute to his memory will be found in the following letter.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, May 8, 1770.

Dear Joe—Your letter did not reach me till the last post, when I had not time to answer it. I left Cambridge immediately after my brother's death.

I am obliged to you for the particular account you have sent me * * * * * * He, to whom I have surrendered myself and all my concerns, has otherwise appointed, and let his will be done. He gives me much, which he withholds from others, and if he was pleased to withhold all that makes an outward difference between me and the poor mendicant in the street, it would still become me to say, his will be done.

It pleased God to cut short my brother's connexions and expectations here, yet not without giving him lively and glorious views of a better happiness than any he could propose to himself in such

a world as this. Notwithstanding his great learning, (for he was one of the chief men in the university in that respect,) he was candid and sincere in his inquiries after truth. Though he could not come into my sentiments when I first acquainted him with them, nor in the many conversations which I afterward had with him upon the subject, could he be brought to acquiesce in them as scriptural and true, yet I had no sooner left St. Alban's than he began to study, with the deepest attention, those points in which we differed, and to furnish himself with the best writers upon them. His mind was kept open to conviction for five years, during all which time he laboured in this pursuit with unwearied diligence, as leisure and opportunity were afforded. Amongst his dying words were these: "Brother, I thought you wrong, yet wanted to believe as you did. I found myself not able to believe, yet always thought I should be one day brought to do so." From the study of books he was brought, upon his death-bed, to the study of himself, and there learnt to renounce his righteousness and his own most amiable character, and to submit himself to the righteousness which is of God by faith. With these views he was desirous of death. Satisfied of his interest in the blessing purchased by the blood of Christ, he prayed for death with earnestness, felt the approach of it with joy, and died in peace.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

It is this simple yet firm reliance on the merits of the Saviour, and on his atoning blood and righteousness, that can alone impart true peace to the soul. Such was the faith of patriarchs, prophets, and apostles; and such will be the faith of all who are taught of God. Works do not go before, but follow after; they are not the cause, but the effect; the fruits of faith; and indispensable to glorify God, to attest the power and reality of divine grace, and to determine the measure of our everlasting reward.

Cowper's feelings on this impressive occasion are still further disclosed in the following letter.

TO MRS. COWPER.

Olney, June 7, 1770.

My dear Cousin—I am obliged to you for sometimes thinking of an unseen friend, and bestowing a letter upon me. It gives me pleasure to hear from you, especially to find that our gracious Lord enables you to weather out the storms you meet with, and to cast anchor within the veil.

You judge rightly of the manner in which I have been affected by the Lord's late dispensation towards my brother. I found in it cause of sorrow, that I had lost so near a relation and one so deservedly dear to me, and that he left me just when our sentiments upon the most interesting subject became the same, but much more cause of joy, that it pleased God to give me clear and evident proof that he had changed his heart, and adopted him

into the number of his children. For this, I hold myself peculiarly bound to thank him, because he might have done all that he was pleased to do for him, and yet have afforded him neither strength nor opportunity to declare it. I doubt not that he enlightens the understandings, and works a gracious change in the hearts of many, in their last moments, whose surrounding friends are not made acquainted with it.

He told me that, from the time he was first ordained, he began to be dissatisfied with his religious opinions, and to suspect that there were greater things concealed in the Bible than were generally believed or allowed to be there. From the time when I first visited him, after my release from St. Alban's, he began to read upon the subject. It was at that time I informed him of the views of divine truth which I had received in that school of affliction. He laid what I said to heart, and began to furnish himself with the best writers upon the controverted points, whose works he read with great diligence and attention, comparing them all the while with the Scripture. None ever truly and ingenuously sought the truth but they found it. A spirit of earnest inquiry is the gift of God, who never says to any, seek ye my face, in vain. Accordingly, about ten days before his death, it pleased the Lord to dispel all his doubts, to reveal in his heart the knowledge of the Saviour, and to give him firm and unshaken peace, in the belief of his ability and willingness to save. As to the affair of the fortune-teller, he never mentioned it to me,

nor was there any such paper found as you mention. I looked over all his papers before I left the place, and, had there been such a one, must have discovered it. I have heard the report from other quarters, but no other particulars than that the woman foretold him when he should die. I suppose there may be some truth in the matter, but, whatever he might think of it before his knowledge of the truth, and however extraordinary her predictions might really be, I am satisfied that he had then received far other views of the wisdom and majesty of God, than to suppose that he would entrust his secret counsels to a vagrant, who did not mean, I suppose, to be understood to have received her intelligence from the fountain of light, but thought herself sufficiently honoured by any who would give her credit for a secret intercourse of this kind with the prince of darkness.

Mrs. Unwin is much obliged to you for your kind inquiry after her. She is well, I thank God, as usual, and sends her respects to you. Her son is in the ministry, and has the living of Stock in Essex. We were last week alarmed with an account of his being dangerously ill; Mrs. Unwin went to see him, and in a few days left him out of danger.

W. C.

The letters of the poet to this amiable relative afford a pleasing insight into the recesses of his pious and sympathizing mind, and, if they have awakened the interest which they are so calculated to excite, the reader will feel concerned to find a

chasm of ten years in this valuable correspondence; the more so as it was chiefly occasioned by a cause which it will soon be our painful office to detail in the course of the ensuing pages. In the autumn of the year in which he sustained the loss of his excellent brother, he wrote the following letter to Mr. Hill.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, Sept. 25, 1770.

Dear Joe—I have not done conversing with terrestrial objects, though I should be happy were I able to hold more continual converse with a Friend above the skies. He has my heart, but he allows a corner in it for all who shew me kindness, and therefore one for you. The storm of sixty-three made a wreck of the friendships I had contracted in the course of many years, yours excepted, which has survived the tempest.

I thank you for your repeated invitation. Singular thanks are due to you for so *singular* an instance of your regard. I could not leave Olney, unless in a case of absolute necessity, without much inconvenience to myself and others.

W. C.

The next year was distinguished by the marriage of his friend Mr. Hill, to a lady of most estimable character, on which occasion Cowper thus addressed him.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, August 27, 1771.

Dear Joe—I take a friend's share in all your

concerns, so far as they come to my knowledge, and consequently did not receive the news of your marriage with indifference. I wish you and your bride all the happiness that belongs to the state; and the still greater felicity of that state which marriage is only a type of. All those connexions shall be dissolved; but there is an indissoluble bond between Christ and his church, the subject of derision to an unthinking world, but the glory and happiness of all his people.

I join with your mother and sisters in their joy upon the present occasion, and beg my affectionate respects to them and to Mrs. Hill unknown.

Yours ever,

W. C.

We do not discover any further traces of his correspondence in the succeeding year than the three following letters. The first proves his great sense of honour and delicate feeling in transactions of a pecuniary nature.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, June 27, 1772.

My dear Friend—I only write to return you thanks for your kind offer—*Agnosco veteris vestigia flammæ.* But I will endeavour to go on without troubling you. Excuse an expression that dishonours your friendship; I should rather say, it would be a trouble to myself, and I know you will be generous enough to give me credit for the assertion. I had rather want many things, any

* Private Correspondence.

thing, indeed, that this world could afford me, than abuse the affection of a friend. I suppose you are sometimes troubled upon my account. But you need not. I have no doubt it will be seen, when my days are closed, that I served a Master who would not suffer me to want any thing that was good for me. He said to Jacob, I will surely do thee good; and this he said, not for his sake only, but for ours also, if we trust in him. This thought relieves me from the greatest part of the distress I should else suffer in my present circumstances, and enables me to sit down peacefully upon the wreck of my fortune.

Yours ever, my dear friend, W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, July 2, 1772.

My dear Friend—My obligations to you sit easy upon me, because I am sure you confer them in the spirit of a friend. 'Tis pleasant to some minds to confer obligations, and it is not unpleasant to others to be properly sensible of them. I hope I have this pleasure—and can with a true sense of your kindness subscribe myself,

Yours, W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, Nov. 5, 1772.

Believe me, my dear friend, truly sensible of your invitation, though I do not accept it. My

* Private Correspondence.

peace of mind is of so delicate a constitution that the air of London will not agree with it. You have my prayers, the only return I can make you for your many acts of still-continued friendship.

If you should smile or even laugh at my conclusion, and I were near enough to see it, I should not be angry, though I should be grieved. It is not long since I should have laughed at such a recompence myself. But, glory be to the name of Jesus, those days are past, and, I trust, never to return!

I am yours, and Mrs. Hill's,
with much sincerity,
W. C.

The kind and affectionate intercourse which subsisted on the part of Cowper and his beloved pastor, has already been adverted to in the preceding history. It was the commerce of two kindred minds, united by a participation in the same blessed hope, and seeking to improve their union by seizing every opportunity of usefulness. Friendship, to be durable, must be pure, virtuous, and holy. All other associations are liable to the caprice of passion and to the changing tide of human events. It is not enough that there be a natural coincidence of character and temperament, a similarity of earthly pursuit and object; there must be materials of a higher fabric, streams flowing from a purer source. There must be the impress of divine grace stamping the same common image and superscription on both hearts. A friendship founded on such a basis, strengthened by time and opportunity, and nou-

rished by the frequent interchange of good offices, is perhaps the nearest approximation to happiness attainable in this chequered life.

Such a friendship is beautifully portrayed by Cowper in the following passage in his Poem on Conversation; and it is highly probable that he alludes to his own feelings on this occasion, and to the connexion subsisting between himself and Newton.

> True bliss, if man may reach it, is compos'd
> Of hearts in union mutually disclos'd;
> And, farewell else all hope of pure delight!
> Those hearts should be reclaim'd, renew'd, upright.
> Bad men, profaning friendship's hallow'd name,
> Form, in its stead, a covenant of shame:
> * * * * * *
> * * * * * *
> But souls, that carry on a blest exchange
> Of joys they meet with in their heavenly range,
> And, with a fearless confidence, make known
> The sorrows sympathy esteems its own;
> Daily derive increasing light and force
> From such communion in their pleasant course,
> Feel less the journey's roughness and its length,
> Meet their opposers with united strength,
> And, one in heart, in interest, and design,
> Gird up each other to the race divine.

It is to the friendship and intercourse formed between these two excellent men, that we are indebted for the origin of the Olney hymns. These hymns are too celebrated in the annals of sacred poetry not to demand special notice in a life of Cowper, who contributed to that collection some of the most beauti-

ful and devotional effusions that ever enriched this species of composition. They were the joint production of the divine and the poet, and intended (as the former expressly says in his preface) "as a monument to perpetuate the remembrance of an intimate and endeared friendship." They were subsequently introduced into the parish church of Olney, with the view of raising the tone and character of church psalmody. The old version of Sternhold and Hopkins, previously used and still retained in many of our churches, was considered to be too antiquated in its language, and not sufficiently imbued with the characteristic features of the Gospel dispensation, to be adapted to the advancing spirit of religion. It was to supply this defect that the above work was thus introduced, and the acceptance with which it was received fully justified the expectation. Viewed in this light, it is a kind of epoch in the history of the Established Church. Other communities of Christians had long employed the instrumentality of hymns to embody the feelings of devotion; but our own church had not felt this necessity, or adopted the custom; prejudice had even interposed, in some instances, to resist their introduction, till the right was fully established by the decision of law.* The prejudices of past times are, however, at length rapidly giving way to the wishes and demands of modern piety; and we can now appeal to the versions of a Stewart,

* The Rev. T. Cotterill, formerly of Sheffield, and in much esteem for his piety and usefulness, was the first who established this right by a judicial proceeding.

a Noel, a Pratt, a Bickersteth, and many others, as a most suitable vehicle for this devotional exercise. The Olney hymns are entitled to the praise of being the precursors of this improved mode of psalmody, jointly with the Collection of the Rev. M. Madan, at the Lock, and that of Mr. Berridge, at Everton.

But, independently of this circumstance, they present far higher claims. They portray the varied emotions of the human heart in its conflicts with sin, and aspirations after holiness. We there contemplate the depression of sorrow and the triumph of hope; the terrors inspired by the law and the confidence awakened by the Gospel; and, what may be considered as the genuine transcript of the poet's own mind, especially in the celebrated hymn, ("God moves in a mysterious way," &c.,) we see depicted, in impressive language, the struggles of a faith trying to penetrate into the dark and mysterious dispensations of God, and at length reposing on his unchangeable faithfulness and love. These sentiments and feelings, so descriptive of the exercises of the soul, find a response in every awakened heart; and the church of Christ will never cease to claim its property in effusions like these till the Christian warfare is ended, and the perceptions of erring reason and sense are exchanged for the bright visions of eternity.

The undertaking commenced about the year 1771, though the collection was not finally completed and published till 1779. The total number contributed by Cowper was sixty-eight hymns. They are distinguished by the initial letter of his name. It was

originally stipulated that each should bear their proportion in this joint labour, till the whole work was accomplished. With this understanding, the pious design was gradually proceeding in its auspicious course, when, by one of those solemn and mysterious dispensations from which neither rank, nor genius, nor moral excellence can claim exemption, it pleased Him whose "way is in the deep," and whose "footsteps are not known," and of whom it is emphatically said, "that clouds and darkness are round about him," though "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne," to suspend the powers of this interesting sufferer and once more to shroud them in darkness.

In contemplating this event, in the peculiarity of its time, character and consequences, well may we exclaim, "Lord, what is man!" and, while the consciousness of the infinite wisdom and mercy of God precludes us from saying, "What doest Thou?" we feel that it must be reserved for eternity to develope the mysterious design of these dispensations.

It was in the year 1773 that this afflicting malady returned. Cowper sunk into such severe paroxysms of religious despondency, that he required an attendant of the most gentle, vigilant, and inflexible spirit. Such an attendant he found in that faithful guardian, whom he had professed to love as a mother, and who watched over him during this long fit of a most depressing malady, extended through several years, with that perfect mixture of tenderness and fortitude which constitutes the cha-

racteristic feature of female services. I wish to pass rapidly over this calamitous period, and shall only observe that nothing could surpass the sufferings of the patient or excel the care of the nurse. Her unremitting attentions received the most delightful of rewards in seeing the pure and powerful mind, to whose restoration she had so greatly contributed, not only gradually restored to the common enjoyments of life, but successively endowed with new and marvellous funds of diversified talents, and a vigorous application of them.

The spirit of Cowper emerged by slow degrees from its deep dejection; and, before his mind was sufficiently recovered to employ itself on literary composition, it sought and found much relief and amusement in domesticating a little group of hares. On his expressing a wish to divert himself by rearing a single leveret, the good-nature of his neighbours supplied him with three. The variety of their dispositions became a source of great entertainment to his compassionate and contemplative spirit. One of the trio he has celebrated in the Task, and a very animated and minute account of this singular family, humanized, and described most admirably by himself in prose, appeared first in the Gentleman's Magazine, and was subsequently inserted in the second volume of his poems. These interesting animals had not only the honour of being cherished and celebrated by a poet, but the pencil has also contributed to their renown.

His three tame hares, Mrs. Unwin, and Mr. Newton, were, for a considerable time, the only com-

panions of Cowper; but, as Mr. Newton was removed to a distance from his afflicted friend by preferment in London,* (to which he was presented by that liberal encourager of active piety, Mr. Thornton,) before he left Olney, in 1780, he humanely triumphed over the strong reluctance of Cowper to see a stranger, and kindly introduced him to the regard and good offices of the Rev. Mr. Bull of Newport-Pagnell. This excellent man, so distinguished by his piety and wit, and honoured by the friendship of John Thornton, from that time considered it to be his duty to visit the invalid once a fortnight, and acquired, by degrees, his cordial and confidential esteem.

The affectionate temper of Cowper inclined him particularly to exert his talents at the request of his friends; even in seasons when such exertion could hardly have been made without a painful degree of self-command.

At the suggestion of Mr. Newton, we have seen him writing a series of hymns: at the request of Mr. Bull, he translated several spiritual songs, from the poetry of Madame de la Mothe Guyon, the tender and mystical French writer, whose talents and misfortunes drew upon her a long series of persecution from many acrimonious bigots, and secured to her the friendship of the mild and pious Fenelon!

We shall perceive, as we advance, that the more distinguished works of Cowper were also written at the express desire of persons whom he particularly

* He was presented to the living of St. Mary Woolnoth, in the City.—*Ed.*

regarded; and it may be remarked to the honour of friendship, that he considered its influence as the happiest inspiration; or, to use his own expressive words,

> The poet's lyre, to fix his fame,
> Should be the poet's heart;
> Affection lights a brighter flame,
> Than ever blazed by art.

The poetry of Cowper is itself an admirable illustration of this maxim; and perhaps the maxim may point to the principal source of that uncommon force and felicity with which this most feeling poet commands the affection of his reader.

In delineating the life of an author, it seems the duty of biography to indicate the degree of influence which the warmth of his heart produced on the fertility of his mind. But those mingled flames of friendship and poetry, which were to burst forth with the most powerful effect in the compositions of Cowper, were not yet kindled. His depressing malady had suspended the exercise of his genius for several years, and precluded him from renewing his correspondence with the relation whom he so cordially regarded in Hertfordshire, except by brief letters on pecuniary concerns.

We insert the following as discovering symptoms of approaching convalescence.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, Nov. 12, 1776.

Dear Friend—One to whom fish is so welcome

* Private Correspondence.

as it is to me can have no great occasion to distinguish the sorts. In general, therefore, whatever fish are likely to think a jaunt into the country agreeable will be sure to find me ready to receive them.

Having suffered so much by nervous fevers myself, I know how to congratulate Ashley upon his recovery. Other distempers only batter the walls; but *they* creep silently into the citadel and put the garrison to the sword.

You perceive I have not made a squeamish use of your obliging offer. The remembrance of past years, and of the sentiments formerly exchanged in our evening walks, convinces me still that an unreserved acceptance of what is graciously offered is the handsomest way of dealing with one of your character.

Believe me yours,

W. C.

As to the frequency, which you leave to my choice too, you have no need to exceed the number of your former remittances.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, April—I fancy the 20th, 1777.

My dear Friend—Thanks for a turbot, a lobster, and Captain Brydone; a gentleman, who relates his travels so agreeably, that he deserves always to

* Private Corresponpence.

travel with an agreeable companion. I have been reading Gray's Works, and think him the only poet since Shakspeare entitled to the character of sublime. Perhaps you will remember that I once had a different opinion of him. I was prejudiced. He did not belong to our Thursday society, and was an Eton man, which lowered him prodigiously in our esteem. I once thought Swift's Letters the best that could be written; but I like Gray's better. His humour, or his wit, or whatever it is to be called, is never ill-natured or offensive, and yet, I think, equally poignant with the Dean's.

I am yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, May 25, 1777.

My dear Friend—We differ not much in our opinion of Gray. When I wrote last, I was in the middle of the book. His later Epistles, I think, are worth little, *as such*, but might be turned to excellent account by a young student of taste and judgment. As to West's Letters, I think I could easily bring your opinion of them to square with mine. They are elegant and sensible, but have nothing in them that is characteristic, or that discriminates them from the letters of any other young man of taste and learning. As to the book you mention, I am in doubt whether to read it or not.

* Private Correspondence.

I should like the philosophical part of it, but the political, which, I suppose, is a detail of intrigues carried on by the Company and their servants, a history of rising and falling nabobs, I should have no appetite to at all. I will not, therefore, give you the trouble of sending it at present.

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, July 13, 1777.

My dear Friend—You need not give yourself any further trouble to procure me the South Sea Voyages. Lord Dartmouth, who was here about a month since, and was so kind as to pay me two visits, has furnished me with both Cook's and Forster's. 'Tis well for the poor natives of those distant countries that our national expenses cannot be supplied by cargoes of yams and bananas. Curiosity, therefore, being once satisfied, they may possibly be permitted for the future to enjoy their riches of that kind in peace.

If, when you are most at leisure, you can find out Baker upon the Microscope, or Vincent Bourne's Latin Poems, the last edition, and send them, I shall be obliged to you—either, or both, if they can be easily found.

I am yours affectionately,

W. C.

* Private Correspondence.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, Jan. 1, 1778.

My dear Friend—Your last packet was doubly welcome, and Mrs. Hill's kindness gives me peculiar pleasure, not as coming from a stranger to me, for I do not account her so, though I never saw her, but as coming from one so nearly connected with yourself. I shall take care to acknowledge the receipt of her obliging letter, when I return the books. Assure yourself, in the mean time, that I read as if the librarian was at my elbow, continually jogging it, and growling out, Make haste. But, as I read aloud, I shall not have finished before the end of the week, and will return them by the diligence next Monday.

I shall be glad if you will let me know whether I am to understand by the sorrow you express that any part of my former supplies is actually cut off, or whether they are only more tardy in coming in than usual. It is useful, even to the rich, to know, as nearly as may be, the exact amount of their income; but how much more so to a man of my small dimensions! If the former should be the case, I shall have less reason to be surprised than I have to wonder at the continuance of them so long. Favours are favours indeed, when laid out upon so barren a soil, where the expense of sowing is never accompanied by the smallest hope of return. What pain there is in gratitude, I have often felt; but the

* Private Correspondence.

pleasure of requiting an obligation has always been out of my reach.

Affectionately yours,
W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, April 11, 1778.

My dear Friend—Poor Sir Thomas!† I knew that I had a place in his affections, and, from his own information many years ago, a place in his will; but little thought that after the lapse of so many years I should still retain it. His remembrance of me, after so long a season of separation, has done me much honour, and leaves me the more reason to regret his decease.

I am reading the Abbé with great satisfaction,‡ and think him the most intelligent writer upon so extensive a subject I ever met with; in every respect superior to the Abbé in Scotland.

Yours affectionately,
W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.‖

Olney, May 7, 1778.

My dear Friend—I have been in continual fear lest every post should bring a summons for the

* Private Correspondence.

† Sir Thomas Hesketh, Baronet, of Rufford Hall, in Lancashire.

‡ Raynal.

‖ Private Correspondence.

Abbé Raynal, and am glad that I have finished him before my fears were realized. I have kept him long, but not through neglect or idleness. I read the five volumes to Mrs. Unwin; and my voice will seldom serve me with more than an hour's reading at a time. I am indebted to him for much information upon subjects which, however interesting, are so remote from those with which country folks in general are conversant, that, had not his works reached me at Olney, I should have been for ever ignorant of them.

I admire him as a philosopher, as a writer, as a man of extraordinary intelligence, and no less extraordinary abilities to digest it. He is a true patriot. But then the world is his country The frauds and tricks of the cabinet and the counter seem to be equally objects of his aversion. And, if he had not found that religion too had undergone a mixture of artifice, in its turn, perhaps he would have been a Christian.

Yours affectionately,
W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, June 18, 1778.

My dear Friend—I truly rejoice that the Chancellor has made you such a present, that he has given such an additional lustre to it by his manner of conferring it, and that all this happened before

* Private Correspondence.

you went to Wargrave, because it made your retirement there the more agreeable. This is just according to the character of the man. He will give grudgingly in answer to solicitation, but delights in surprising those he esteems with his bounty. May you live to receive still further proofs that I am not mistaken in my opinion of him!

Yours affectionately,
W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, June 18, 1778.

Dear Unwin—I feel myself much obliged to you for your intimation, and have given the subject of it all my best attention, both before I received your letter and since. The result is, that I am persuaded it will be better not to write. I know the man and his disposition well; he is very liberal in his way of thinking, generous, and discerning. He is well aware of the tricks that are played upon such occasions, and, after fifteen years interruption of all intercourse between us, would translate my letter into this language—pray remember the poor.* This would disgust him, because he would think our former intimacy disgraced by such an oblique application. He has not forgotten me, and, if he

* Mr. Unwin had suggested to Cowper the propriety of an application to Lord Thurlow for some mark of favour; which the latter never conferred, and which Cowper was resolved never to solicit.

had, there are those about him who cannot come into his presence without reminding him of me, and he is also perfectly acquainted with my circumstances. It would, perhaps, give him pleasure to surprise me with a benefit, and if he means me such a favour I should disappoint him by asking it.

I repeat my thanks for your suggestion: you see a part of my reasons for thus conducting myself; if we were together, I could give you more.

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, May 26, 1779.

I am obliged to you for the Poets, and, though I little thought that I was translating so much money out of your pocket into the bookseller's, when I turned Prior's poem into Latin, yet I must needs say that, if you think it worth while to purchase the English Classics at all, you cannot possess yourself of them upon better terms. I have looked into some of the volumes, but, not having yet finished the Register, have merely looked into them. A few things I have met with, which, if they had been burned the moment they were written, it would have been better for the author, and at least as well for his readers. There is not much of this, but a little is too much. I think it a pity the editor admitted any; the English Muse would have lost no

credit by the omission of such trash. Some of them, again, seem to me to have but a very disputable right to a place among the Classics, and I am quite at a loss, when I see them in such company, to conjecture what is Dr. Johnson's idea or definition of classical merit. But, if he inserts the poems of some who can hardly be said to deserve such an honour, the purchaser may comfort himself with the hope that he will exclude none that do.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.*

Olney, July — 79.

My dear Friend—When I was at Margate, it was an excursion of pleasure to go to see Ramsgate. The pier, I remember, was accounted a most excellent piece of stone-work, and such I found it. By this time, I suppose, it is finished, and surely it is no small advantage that you have an opportunity of observing how nicely those great stones are put together, as often as you please, without either trouble or expense.

* * * * *

There was not, at that time, much to be seen in the Isle of Thanet, besides the beauty of the country and the fine prospects of the sea, which are no where surpassed, except in the Isle of Wight or upon some parts of the coast of Hampshire. One sight, however, I remember, engaged my curiosity,

* Private Correspondence.

and I went to see it—a fine piece of ruins, built by the late Lord Holland at a great expense, which, the day after I saw it, tumbled down for nothing. Perhaps, therefore, it is still a ruin; and, if it is, I would advise you by all means to visit it, as it must have been much improved by this fortunate incident. It is hardly possible to put stones together with that air of wild and magnificent disorder which they are sure to acquire by falling of their own accord.

I remember (the last thing I mean to remember upon this occasion) that Sam Cox, the counsel, walking by the sea-side, as if absorbed in deep contemplation, was questioned about what he was musing on. He replied, "I was wondering that such an almost infinite and unwieldy element should produce *a sprat.*"

Our love attends your whole party.

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.*

Olney, July 17, 1779.

My dear Friend—We envy you your sea-breezes. In the garden we feel nothing but the reflection of the heat from the walls, and in the parlour, from the opposite houses. I fancy Virgil was so situated, when he wrote those two beautiful lines:

* Private Correspondence.

. . . . Oh quis me gelidis in vallibus Hæmi
Sistat, et ingenti ramorum protegat umbrâ!

The worst of it is that, though the sun-beams strike as forcibly upon my harp-strings as they did upon his, they elicit no such sounds, but rather produce such groans as they are said to have drawn from those of the statue of Memnon.

As you have ventured to make the experiment, your own experience will be your best guide in the article of bathing. An inference will hardly follow, though one should pull at it with all one's might, from Smollett's case to yours. He was corpulent, muscular, and strong; whereas, if you were either stolen or strayed, such a description of you in an advertisement would hardly direct an inquirer with sufficient accuracy and exactness. But, if bathing does not make your head ache or prevent you sleeping at night, I should imagine it could not hurt you.

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, September 21, 1779.

Amico mio, be pleased to buy me a glazier's diamond pencil. I have glazed the two frames, designed to receive my pine plants. But I cannot mend the kitchen windows, till, by the help of that implement, I can reduce the glass to its proper dimensions. If I were a plumber, I should be a com-

plete glazier, and possibly the happy time may come, when I shall be seen trudging away to the neighbouring towns with a shelf of glass hanging at my back. If government should impose another tax upon that commodity, I hardly know a business in which a gentleman might more successfully employ himself. A Chinese, of ten times my fortune, would avail himself of such an opportunity without scruple; and why should not I, who want money as much as any mandarin in China? Rousseau would have been charmed to have seen me so occupied, and would have exclaimed with rapture "that he had found the Emilius, who (he supposed) had subsisted only in his own idea." I would recommend it to you to follow my example. You will presently qualify yourself for the task, and may not only amuse yourself at home, but may even exercise your skill in mending the church windows; which, as it would save money to the parish, would conduce, together with your other ministerial accomplishments, to make you extremely popular in the place.

I have eight pair of tame pigeons. When I first enter the garden in the morning, I find them perched upon the wall, waiting for their breakfast, for I feed them always upon the gravel-walk. If your wish should be accomplished, and you should find yourself furnished with the wings of a dove, I shall undoubtedly find you amongst them. Only be so good, if that should be the case, to announce yourself by some means or other. For I imagine your crop will require something better than tares to fill it.

Your mother and I, last week, made a trip in a post-chaise to Gayhurst, the seat of Mr. Wright, about four miles off. He understood that I did not much affect strange faces, and sent over his servant, on purpose to inform me that he was going into Leicestershire, and that if I chose to see the gardens I might gratify myself without danger of seeing the proprietor. I accepted the invitation, and was delighted with all I found there. The situation is happy, the gardens elegantly disposed, the hot-house in the most flourishing state, and the orange-trees the most captivating creatures of the kind I ever saw. A man, in short, had need have the talents of Cox or Langford, the auctioneers, to do the whole scene justice.

Our love attends you all.

Yours,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, Oct. 2, 1779.

My dear Friend—You begin to count the remaining days of the vacation, not with impatience, but through unwillingness to see the end of it. For the mind of man, at least of most men, is equally busy in anticipating the evil and the good. That word *anticipation* puts me in remembrance of the pamphlet of that name, which, if you purchased, I should be glad to borrow. I have seen only an extract from it in the Review, which made me laugh heartily and wish to peruse the whole.

* Private Correspondence.

The newspaper informs me of the arrival of the Jamaica fleet. I hope it imports some pine-apple plants for me. I have a good frame, and a good bed prepared to receive them. I send you annexed a fable, in which the pine-apple makes a figure, and shall be glad if you like the taste of it. Two pair of soles, with shrimps, which arrived last night, demand my acknowledgments. You have heard that when Arion performed upon the harp the fish followed him. I really have no design to fiddle you out of more fish; but, if you should esteem my verses worthy of such a price, though I shall never be so renowned as he was, I shall think myself equally indebted to the Muse that helps me.

THE PINE APPLE AND THE BEE.

"The pine-apples," &c.*

My affectionate respects attend Mrs. Hill. She has put Mr. Wright to the expense of building a new hot-house: the plants produced by the seeds she gave me having grown so large as to require an apartment by themselves.

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Oct. 31, 1779.

My dear Friend—I wrote my last letter merely to inform you that I had nothing to say, in answer to which you have said nothing. I admire the pro-

* Vide Cowper's Poems.

priety of your conduct, though I am a loser by it. I will endeavour to say something now, and shall hope for something in return.

I have been well entertained with Johnson's biography, for which I thank you: with one exception, and that a swingeing one, I think he has acquitted himself with his usual good sense and sufficiency. His treatment of Milton is unmerciful to the last degree. He has belaboured that great poet's character with the most industrious cruelty. As a man, he has hardly left him the shadow of one good quality. Churlishness in his private life, and a rancorous hatred of every thing royal in his public, are the two colours with which he has smeared all the canvas. If he had any virtues, they are not to be found in the Doctor's picture of him; and it is well for Milton that some sourness in his temper is the only vice with which his memory has been charged; it is evident enough that, if his biographer could have discovered more, he would not have spared him. As a poet, he has treated him with severity enough, and has plucked one or two of the most beautiful feathers out of his Muse's wing and trampled them under his great foot. He has passed sentence of condemnation upon Lycidas, and has taken occasion, from that charming poem, to expose to ridicule (what is indeed ridiculous enough) the childish prattlement of pastoral compositions, as if Lycidas was the prototype and pattern of them all. The liveliness of the description, the sweetness of the numbers, the classical spirit of antiquity that prevails in it, go for nothing. I am convinced, by the way, that he has no ear for poetical numbers, or that

it was stopped, by prejudice, against the harmony of Milton's. Was there ever any thing so delightful as the music of the Paradise Lost? It is like that of a fine organ; has the fullest and deepest tones of majesty, with all the softness and elegance of the Dorian flute, variety without end, and never equalled, unless, perhaps, by Virgil. Yet the Doctor has little or nothing to say upon this copious theme, but talks something about the unfitness of the English language for blank verse, and how apt it is, in the mouth of some readers, to degenerate into declamation.

I could talk a good while longer, but I have no room. Our love attends you.

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, Nov. 14, 1779.

My dear Friend—Your approbation of my last Heliconian present encourages me to send you another. I wrote it, indeed, on purpose for you; for my subjects are not always such as I could hope would prove agreeable to you. My mind has always a melancholy cast, and is like some pools I have seen, which, though filled with a black and putrid water, will nevertheless, in a bright day, reflect the sun-beams from their surface.

ON THE PROMOTION OF EDWARD THURLOW, &c.†

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

* Private Correspondence. † Vide Cowper's Poems.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Dec. 2, 1779.

My dear Friend—How quick is the succession of human events! The cares of to-day are seldom the cares of to-morrow; and when we lie down at night, we may safely say to most of our troubles—"Ye have done your worst, and we shall meet no more."

This observation was suggested to me by reading your last letter, which, though I have written since I received it, I have never answered. When that epistle passed under your pen, you were miserable about your tithes, and your imagination was hung round with pictures, that terrified you to such a degree as made even the receipt of money burthensome. But it is all over now. You sent away your farmers in good humour, (for you can make people merry whenever you please,) and now you have nothing to do but to chink your purse and laugh at what is past. Your delicacy makes you groan under that which other men never feel, or feel but lightly. A fly that settles upon the tip of the nose is troublesome; and this is a comparison adequate to the most that mankind in general are sensible of upon such tiny occasions. But the flies that pester you always get between your eye-lids, where the annoyance is almost insupportable.

I would follow your advice, and endeavour to furnish Lord North with a scheme of supplies for the ensuing year, if the difficulty I find in answering the call of my own emergencies did not make me

despair of satisfying those of the nation. I can say but this: if I had ten acres of land in the world, whereas I have not one, and in those ten acres should discover a gold mine, richer than all Mexico and Peru, when I had reserved a few ounces for my own annual supply I would willingly give the rest to government. My ambition would be more gratified by annihilating the national incumbrances than by going daily down to the bottom of a mine, to wallow in my own emolument. This is patriotism —you will allow; but, alas! this virtue is for the most part in the hands of those who can do no good with it! He that has but a single handful of it catches so greedily at the first opportunity of growing rich, that his patriotism drops to the ground, and he grasps the gold instead of it. He that never meets with such an opportunity holds it fast in his clenched fists, and says—"Oh, how much good I would do if I could!"

Your mother says—"Pray send my dear love." There is hardly room to add mine, but you will suppose it.

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Feb. 27, 1780.

My dear Friend—As you are pleased to desire my letters, I am the more pleased with writing them; though, at the same time, I must needs testify my surprise that you should think them worth

receiving, as I seldom send one that I think favourably of myself. This is not to be understood as an imputation upon your taste or judgment, but as an encomium upon my own modesty and humility, which I desire you to remark well. It is a just observation of Sir Joshua Reynolds, that, though men of ordinary talents may be highly satisfied with their own productions, men of true genius never are. Whatever be their subject, they always seem to themselves to fall short of it, even when they seem to others most to excel; and for this reason—because they have a certain sublime sense of perfection, which other men are strangers to, and which they themselves in their performances are not able to exemplify. Your servant, Sir Joshua! I little thought of seeing you when I began, but as you have popped in you are welcome.

When I wrote last, I was a little inclined to send you a copy of verses, entitled the Modern Patriot, but was not quite pleased with a line or two, which I found it difficult to mend, therefore did not. At night I read Mr. Burke's speech in the newspaper, and was so well pleased with his proposals for a reformation, and the temper in which he made them, that I began to think better of his cause, and burnt my verses. Such is the lot of the man who writes upon the subject of the day; the aspect of affairs changes in an hour or two, and his opinion with it; what was just and well-deserved satire in the morning, in the evening becomes a libel; the author commences his own judge, and, while he condemns with unrelenting severity what he so

lately approved, is sorry to find that he has laid his leaf-gold upon touchwood, which crumbled away under his fingers. Alas! what can I do with my wit? I have not enough to do great things with, and these little things are so fugitive, that, while a man catches at the subject, he is only filling his hand with smoke. I must do with it as I do with my linnet: I keep him for the most part in a cage, but now and then set open the door, that he may whisk about the room a little, and then shut him up again. My whisking wit has produced the following, the subject of which is more important than the manner in which I have treated it seems to imply, but a fable may speak truth, and all truth is sterling; I only premise that, in the philosophical tract in the Register, I found it asserted that the glow-worm is the nightingale's food.*

An officer of a regiment, part of which is quartered here, gave one of the soldiers leave to be drunk six weeks, in hopes of curing him by satiety —he *was* drunk six weeks, and is so still, as often as he can find an opportunity. One vice may swallow up another, but no coroner, in the state of Ethics, ever brought in his verdict, when a vice died, that it was—felo de se.

Thanks for all you have done and all you intend; the biography will be particularly welcome.

Yours,

W. C.

* This letter contained the beautiful fable of the Nightingale and the Glow-worm.

TO MRS. NEWTON.*

Olney, March 4, 1780.

Dear Madam—To communicate surprise is almost, perhaps quite, as agreeable as to receive it This is my present motive for writing to you rather than to Mr. Newton. He would be pleased with hearing from me, but he would not be surprised at it; you see, therefore, I am selfish upon the present occasion, and principally consult my own gratification. Indeed, if I consulted yours, I should be silent, for I have no such budget as the minister's, furnished and stuffed with ways and means for every emergency, and shall find it difficult, perhaps, to raise supplies even for a short epistle.

You have observed in common conversation, that the man who coughs the oftenest, (I mean if he has not a cold,) does it because he has nothing to say. Even so it is in letter-writing: a long preface, such as mine, is an ugly symptom, and always forebodes great sterility in the following pages.

The vicarage-house became a melancholy object as soon as Mr. Newton had left it; when you left it, it became more melancholy: now it is actually occupied by another family, even I cannot look at it without being shocked. As I walked in the garden this evening, I saw the smoke issue from the study chimney, and said to myself, That used to be a sign that Mr. Newton was there; but it is so no longer. The walls of the house know nothing of the change

* Private Correspondence.

that has taken place; the bolt of the chamber-door sounds just as it used to do; and when Mr. P—— goes upstairs, for aught I know, or ever shall know, the fall of his foot could hardly, perhaps, be distinguished from that of Mr. Newton. But Mr. Newton's foot will never be heard upon that staircase again. These reflections, and such as these, occurred to me upon the occasion; . . . . . If I were in a condition to leave Olney too, I certainly would not stay in it. It is no attachment to the place that binds me here, but an unfitness for every other. I lived in it once, but now I am buried in it, and have no business with the world on the outside of my sepulchre; my appearance would startle them, and theirs would be shocking to me.

Such are my thoughts about the matter. Others are more deeply affected, and by more weighty considerations, having been many years the objects of a ministry which they had reason to account themselves happy in the possession of. . . . . .

We were concerned at your account of Robert, and have little doubt but he will shuffle himself out of his place. Where he will find another is a question not to be resolved by those who recommended him to this. I wrote him a long letter a day or two after the receipt of yours, but I am afraid it was only clapping a blister upon the crown of a wig-block.

My respects attend Mr. Newton and yourself, accompanied with much affection for you both.

Yours, dear Madam,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, March 16, 1780.

My dear Friend—If I had had the horns of a snail, I should have drawn them in the moment I saw the reason of your epistolary brevity, because I felt it too. May your seven reams be multiplied into fourteen, till your letters become truly Lacedæmonian, and are reduced to a single syllable. Though I shall be a sufferer by the effect, I shall rejoice in the cause. You are naturally formed for business, and such a head as yours can never have too much of it. Though my predictions have been fulfilled in two instances, I do not plume myself much upon my sagacity; because it required but little to foresee that Thurlow would be Chancellor, and that you would have a crowded office. As to the rest of my connexions, there too I have given proof of equal foresight, with not a jot more reason for vanity.

. . . . . .

To use the phrase of all who ever wrote upon the state of Europe, the political horizon is dark indeed. The cloud has been thickening, and the thunder advancing many years. The storm now seems to be vertical, and threatens to burst upon the land, as if with the next clap it would shake all to pieces.—As for me, I am no Quaker, except where military matters are in question, and there I am much of the same mind with an honest man, who, when he was forced into the service, declared he would not fight, and gave this reason—because he

* Private Correspondence.

saw nothing worth fighting for. You will say, perhaps, is not liberty worth a struggle? True: but will success insure it to me? Might I not, like the Americans, emancipate myself from one master only to serve a score, and with laurels upon my brow sigh for my former chains again?

Many thanks for your kind invitation. Ditto to Mrs. Hill, for the seeds—unexpected, and therefore the more welcome.

You gave me great pleasure by what you say of my uncle.* His motto shall be

Hic ver perpetuum atque alienis mensibus æstas.

I remember the time when I have been kept waking by the fear that he would die before me; but now I think I shall grow old first.

Yours, my dear friend, affectionately,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, March 18, 1780.

I am obliged to you for the communication of your correspondence with————. It was impossible for any man, of any temper whatever, and however wedded to his own purpose, to resent so gentle and friendly an exhortation as you sent him. Men of lively imaginations are not often remarkable for solidity of judgment. They have generally strong passions to bias it, and are led far away from their proper road, in pursuit of petty phantoms of their own creating. No law ever did or can effect

* Ashley Cowper, Esq.

what he has ascribed to that of Moses: it is reserved for mercy to subdue the corrupt inclinations of mankind, which threatenings and penalties, through the depravity of the heart, have always had a tendency rather to inflame.

The love of power seems as natural to kings as the desire of liberty is to their subjects; the excess of either is vicious and tends to the ruin of both. There are many, I believe, who wish the present corrupt state of things dissolved, in hope that the pure primitive constitution will spring up from the ruins. But it is not for man, by himself man, to bring order out of confusion: the progress from one to the other is not natural, much less necessary, and, without the intervention of divine aid, impossible; and they who are for making the hazardous experiment would certainly find themselves disappointed

Affectionately yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, March 28, 1780.

My dear Friend—I have heard nothing more from Mr. Newton, upon the subject you mention; but I dare say, that, having been given to expect the benefit of your nomination in behalf of his nephew, he still depends upon it. His obligations to Mr. —— have been so numerous and so weighty, that, though he has in a few instances prevailed

upon himself to recommend an object now and then to his patronage, he has very sparingly, if at all, exercised his interest with him in behalf of his own relations.

With respect to the advice you are required to give a young lady, that she may be properly instructed in the manner of keeping the sabbath, I just subjoin a few hints that have occurred to me upon the occasion, not because I think you want them, but because it would seem unkind to withhold them. The sabbath then, I think, may be considered, first, as a commandment no less binding upon modern Christians, than upon ancient Jews, because the spiritual people amongst them did not think it enough to abstain from manual occupations upon that day, but, entering more deeply into the meaning of the precept, allotted those hours they took from the world to the cultivation of holiness in their own souls, which ever was, and ever will be, a duty incumbent upon all who ever heard of a sabbath, and is of perpetual obligation both upon Jews and Christians; (the commandment, therefore, enjoins it; the prophets have also enforced it; and in many instances, both scriptural and modern, the breach of it has been punished with a providential and judicial severity, that may make by-standers tremble:) secondly, as a privilege, which you well know how to dilate upon, better than I can tell you; thirdly, as a sign of that covenant, by which believers are entitled to a rest that yet remaineth; fourthly, as a *sine quâ non* of the Christian character; and, upon this head, I

should guard against being misunderstood to mean no more than two attendances upon public worship, which is a form complied with by thousands who never kept a sabbath in their lives. Consistence is necessary to give substance and solidity to the whole. To sanctify the day at church, and to trifle it away out of church, is profanation, and vitiates all. After all, could I ask my catechumen one short question—"Do you love the day, or do you not? If you love it, you will never inquire how far you may safely deprive yourself of the enjoyment of it. If you do not love it, and you find yourself obliged in conscience to acknowledge it, that is an alarming symptom, and ought to make you tremble. If you do not love it, then it is a weariness to you, and you wish it was over. The ideas of labour and rest are not more opposite to each other than the idea of a sabbath and that dislike and disgust with which it fills the souls of thousands to be obliged to keep it. It is worse than bodily labour."

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, April 6, 1780.

My dear Friend—I never was, any more than yourself, a friend to pluralities; they are generally found in the hands of the avaricious, whose insatiable hunger after preferment proves them unworthy of any at all. They attend much to the regular payment of their dues, but not at all to the spiritual

interests of their parishioners. Having forgot their duty, or never known it, they differ in nothing from the laity, except their outward garb and their exclusive right to the desk and pulpit. But when pluralities seek the man instead of being sought by him, and when the man is honest, conscientious, and pious, careful to employ a substitute, in those respects, like himself; and, not contented with this, will see with his own eyes that the concerns of his parishes are decently and diligently administered; in that case, considering the present dearth of such characters in the ministry, I think it an event advantageous to the people, and much to be desired by all who regret the great and apparent want of sobriety and earnestness among the clergy.* A man who does not seek a living merely as a pecuniary emolument has no need, in my judgment, to refuse one because it is so. He means to do his duty, and by doing it he earns his wages. The two rectories being contiguous to each other, and following easily under the care of one pastor, and both so near to Stock that you can visit them without difficulty as often as you please, I see no reasonable objection, nor does your mother. As to the wry-mouthed sneers and illiberal misconstructions of the censorious, I know no better shield to guard you against them than what you are already furnished with—a clear and unoffended conscience.

I am obliged to you for what you said upon the

* A happy change has occurred since this period, and the revival of piety in the Church of England must be perceptible to every observer.—Ed.

subject of book-buying, and am very fond of availing myself of another man's pocket, when I can do it creditably to myself and without injury to him. Amusements are necessary in a retirement like mine, especially in such a sable state of mind as I labour under. The necessity of amusement makes me sometimes write verses—it made me a carpenter, a bird-cage maker, a gardener—and has lately taught me to draw, and to draw too with such surprising proficiency in the art, considering my total ignorance of it two months ago, that, when I show your mother my productions, she is all admiration and applause.

You need never fear the communication of what you entrust to us in confidence. You know your mother's delicacy on this point sufficiently, and as for me, I once wrote a Connoisseur* upon the subject of secret-keeping, and from that day to this I believe I have never divulged one.

We were much pleased with Mr. Newton's application to you for a charity sermon, and what he said upon that subject in his last letter, "that he was glad of an opportunity to give you that proof of his regard."

Believe me yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, April 16, 1780.

Since I wrote last, we have had a visit from——.

* His meaning is, he contributed to the "Connoisseur" an essay or letter on this subject.

I did not feel myself vehemently disposed to receive him with that complaisance from which a stranger generally infers that he is welcome. By his manner, which was rather bold than easy, I judged that there was no occasion for it, and that it was a trifle which, if he did not meet with, neither would he feel the want of He has the air of a travelled man, but not of a travelled gentleman; is quite delivered from that reserve which is so common an ingredient in the English character, yet does not open himself gently and gradually, as men of polite behaviour do, but bursts upon you all at once. He talks very loud, and when our poor little robins hear a great noise, they are immediately seized with an ambition to surpass it——the increase of their vociferation occasioned an increase of his, and his in return acted as a stimulus upon theirs—neither side entertained a thought of giving up the contest, which became continually more interesting to our ears during the whole visit. The birds however survived it, and so did we. They perhaps flatter themselves they gained a complete victory, but I believe Mr. —— could have killed them both in another hour.

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, May 3, 1780.

Dear Sir—You indulge me in such a variety of subjects, and allow me such a latitude of excursion in this scribbling employment, that I have no ex-

cuse for silence. I am much obliged to you for swallowing such boluses as I send you, for the sake of my gilding, and verily believe I am the only man alive, from whom they would be welcome to a palate like yours. I wish I could make them more splendid than they are, more alluring to the eye, at least, if not more pleasing to the taste; but my leaf-gold is tarnished, and has received such a tinge from the vapours that are ever brooding over my mind, that I think it no small proof of your partiality to me that you will read my letters. I am not fond of long-winded metaphors; I have always observed that they halt at the latter end of their progress, and so does mine. I deal much in ink indeed, but not such ink as is employed by poets and writers of essays. Mine is a harmless fluid, and guilty of no deceptions but such as may prevail, without the least injury, to the person imposed on. I draw mountains, valleys, woods, and streams, and ducks, and dab-chicks. I admire them myself, and Mrs. Unwin admires them, and her praise and my praise put together are fame enough for me. Oh! I could spend whole days and moon-light nights in feeding upon a lovely prospect! My eyes drink the rivers as they flow. If every human being upon earth could think for one quarter of an hour as I have done for many years, there might, perhaps, be many miserable men among them, but not an unwakened one would be found from the arctic to the antartic circle. At present, the difference between them and me is greatly to their advantage. I delight in baubles, and know

them to be so; for viewed without a reference to their author, what is the earth, what are the planets, what is the sun itself, but a bauble? Better for a man never to have seen them, or to see them with the eyes of a brute, stupid and unconscious of what he beholds, than not to be able to say, "The Maker of all these wonders is my friend!" Their eyes have never been opened to see that they are trifles; mine have been, and will be till they are closed for ever. They think a fine estate, a large conservatory, a hothouse, rich as a West-Indian garden, things of consequence, visit them with pleasure, and muse upon them with ten times more. I am pleased with a frame of four lights, doubtful whether the few pines it contains will ever be worth a farthing; amuse myself with a green-house, which Lord Bute's gardener could take upon his back, and walk away with; and when I have paid it the accustomed visit, and watered it, and given it air, I say to myself——"This is not mine, 'tis a play-thing lent me for the present, I must leave it soon."

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, May 6, 1780.

My dear Friend—I am much obliged to you for your speedy answer to my queries. I know less of the law than a country attorney, yet sometimes I think I have almost as much business. My former connexion with the profession has got wind,

though I earnestly profess, and protest, and proclaim it abroad, that I know nothing of the matter, they cannot be persuaded to believe that a head once endowed with a legal perriwig can ever be deficient in those natural endowments it is supposed to cover. I have had the good fortune to be once or twice in the right, which, added to the cheapness of a gratuitous counsel, has advanced my credit to a degree I never expected to attain in the capacity of a lawyer. Indeed, if two of the wisest in the science of jurisprudence may give opposite opinions on the same point, which does not unfrequently happen, it seems to be a matter of indifference, whether a man answers by rule or at a venture. He that stumbles upon the right side of the question is just as useful to his client as he that arrives at the same end by regular approaches, and is conducted to the mark he aims at by the greatest authorities.

* * * *

These violent attacks of a distemper so often fatal are very alarming to all who esteem and respect the Chancellor as he deserves. A life of confinement and of anxious attention to important objects, where the habit is bilious to such a terrible degree, threatens to be but a short one; and I wish he may not be made a text for men of reflection to moralize upon; affording a conspicuous instance of the transient and fading nature of all human accomplishments and attainments.

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN,

Olney, May 8, 1780.

My dear Friend—My scribbling humour has of late been entirely absorbed in the passion for landscape-drawing. It is a most amusing art, and, like every other art, requires much practice and attention

Nil sine multo
Vita labore dedit mortalibus.

Excellence is providentially placed beyond the reach of indolence, that success may be the reward of industry, and that idleness may be punished with obscurity and disgrace. So long as I am pleased with an employment I am capable of unwearied application, because my feelings are all of the intense kind: I never received a *little* pleasure from any thing in my life; if I am delighted, it is in the extreme. The unhappy consequences of this temperament is, that my attachment to any occupation seldom outlives the novelty of it. That nerve of my imagination, that feels the touch of any particular amusement, twangs under the energy of the pressure with so much vehemence, that it soon becomes sensible of weariness and fatigue. Hence I draw an unfavourable prognostic, and expect that I shall shortly be constrained to look out for something else. Then perhaps I may string the harp again, and be able to comply with your demand.

Now for the visit you propose to pay us, and propose *not* to pay us, the hope of which plays

upon your paper, like a jack-o-lantern upon the ceiling. This is no mean simile, for Virgil (you remember) uses it. 'Tis here, 'tis there, it vanishes, it returns, it dazzles you, a cloud interposes, and it is gone. However just the comparison, I hope you will contrive to spoil it, and that your final determination will be to come. As to the masons you expect, bring them with you—bring brick, bring mortar, bring every thing, that would oppose itself to your journey—all shall be welcome. I have a green-house that is too small, come and enlarge it; build me a pinery; repair the garden-wall, that has great need of your assistance; do any thing, you cannot do too much; so far from thinking you and your train troublesome, we shall rejoice to see you, upon these or upon any other terms you can propose. But, to be serious—you will do well to consider that a long summer is before you—that the party will not have such another opportunity to meet this great while—that you may finish your masonry long enough before winter, though you should not begin this month, but that you cannot always find your brother and sister Powley at Olney. These and some other considerations, such as the desire we have to see you, and the pleasure we expect from seeing you all together, may, and I think ought, to overcome your scruples.

From a general recollection of Lord Clarendon's History of the Rebellion, I thought, (and I remember I told you so,) that there was a striking resemblance between that period and the present. But I

am now reading, and have read three volumes of, Hume's History, one of which is engrossed entirely by that subject. There I see reason to alter my opinion, and the seeming resemblance has disappeared upon a more particular information. Charles succeeded to a long train of arbitrary princes, whose subjects had tamely acquiesced in the despotism of their masters till their privileges were all forgot. He did but tread in their steps, and exemplify the principles in which he had been brought up, when he oppressed his people. But, just at that time, unhappily for the monarch, the subject began to see, and to see that he had a right to property and freedom. This marks a sufficient difference between the disputes of that day and the present. But there was another main cause of that rebellion, which at this time does not operate at all. The king was devoted to the hierarchy; his subjects were puritans and would not bear it. Every circumstance of ecclesiastical order and discipline was an abomination to them, and in his esteem an indispensable duty, and, though at last he was obliged to give up many things, he would not abolish Episcopacy, and till that were done his concessions could have no conciliating effect. These two concurring causes were indeed sufficient to set three kingdoms in a flame. But they subsist not now, nor any other, I hope, notwithstanding the bustle made by the patriots, equal to the production of such terrible events.*

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C

* To those who contemplate the course of modern events, and the signs of the times, there may be a doubt whether the

The correspondence of the poet with his cousin Mrs. Cowper was at this time resumed, after an interval of ten years. She was deeply afflicted by the loss of her brother, Frederic Madan, an officer who died in America, after having distinguished himself by poetical talents as well as by military virtues.

TO MRS. COWPER.

Olney, May 10, 1780.

My dear Cousin—I do not write to comfort you: that office is not likely to be well performed by one who has no comfort for himself; nor to comply with an impertinent ceremony, which in general might well be spared upon such occasions; but because I would not seem indifferent to the concerns of those I have so much reason to esteem and love. If I did not sorrow for your brother's death, I should expect that nobody would for mine; when I knew him, he was much beloved, and I doubt not continued to be so. To live and die together is the lot of a few happy families, who hardly know what a separation means, and one sepulchre serves them all; but the ashes of our kindred are dispersed indeed. Whether the American Gulf has swallowed up any other of my relations, I know not; it has made many mourners.

Believe me, my dear cousin, though after a long

sentiment here expressed is equally applicable in the present age. May the union of good and wise men be the means, under the Providence of God, of averting every threatening danger.

silence, which, perhaps, nothing less than the present concern could have prevailed with me to interrupt, as much as ever,

Your affectionate kinsman,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, May 10, 1780.

My dear Friend—If authors could have lived to adjust and authenticate their own text, a commentator would have been a useless creature. For instance—if Dr. Bentley had found, or opined that he had found, the word *tube*, where it seemed to present itself to you, and had judged the subject worthy of his critical acumen, he would either have justified the corrupt reading, or have substituted some invention of his own, in defence of which he would have exerted all his polemical abilities, and have quarrelled with half the literati in Europe. Then suppose the writer himself, as in the present case, to interpose, with a gentle whisper, thus—" If you look again, doctor, you will perceive, that what appears to you to be *tube* is neither more nor less than the monosyllable *ink*, but I wrote it in great haste, and the want of sufficient precision in the character has occasioned your mistake: *you* will be satisfied, especially when you see the sense elucidated by the explanation."—But I question whether the doctor would quit his ground, or allow any author to be a competent

judge in his own case. The world, however, would acquiesce immediately, and vote the critic useless.

James Andrews, who is my Michael Angelo, pays me many compliments on my success in the art of drawing, but I have not yet the vanity to think myself qualified to furnish your apartment. If I should ever attain to the degree of self-opinion requisite to such an undertaking, I shall labour at it with pleasure. I can only say, though I hope not with the affected modesty of the above-mentioned Dr. Bentley, who said the same thing,

Me quoque dicunt
Vatem pastores; sed non ego credulus illis.

A crow, rook, or raven, has built a nest in one of the young elm-trees at the side of Mrs. Aspray's orchard. In the violent storm that blew yesterday morning, I saw it agitated to a degree that seemed to threaten its immediate destruction, and versified the following thoughts upon the occasion.* W. C.

TO MRS. NEWTON.†

Olney, June 2, 1780.

Dear Madam—When I write to Mr. Newton, he answers me by letter; when I write to you, you answer me in fish. I return you many thanks for the mackerel and lobster. They assured me, in terms as intelligible as pen and ink could have

* Cowper's fable of the Raven concluded this letter.

† Private Correspondence.

spoken, that you still remember *Orchard-side;* and, though they never spoke in their lives, and it was still less to be expected from them that they should speak being dead, they gave us an assurance of your affection that corresponds exactly with that which Mr. Newton expresses towards us in all his letters.—For my own part, I never in my life began a letter more at a venture than the present. It is possible that I may finish it, but perhaps more than probable that I shall not. I have had several indifferent nights, and the wind is easterly; two circumstances so unfavourable to me in all my occupations, but especially that of writing, that it was with the greatest difficulty I could even bring myself to attempt it.

You have never yet perhaps been made acquainted with the unfortunate Tom F—'s misadventure. He and his wife, returning from Hanslope fair, were coming down Weston-lane; to wit, themselves, their horse, and their great wooden panniers, at ten o'clock at night. The horse, having a lively imagination and very weak nerves, fancied he either saw or heard something, but has never been able to say what. A sudden fright will impart activity and a momentary vigour even to lameness itself. Acccordingly he started, and sprang from the middle of the road to the side of it, with such surprising alacrity, that he dismounted the gingerbread baker and his gingerbread wife in a moment. Not contented with this effort, nor thinking himself yet out of danger, he proceeded as fast as he could to a full gallop, rushed against the gate at the bottom of the

lane, and opened it for himself, without perceiving that there was any gate there. Still he galloped, and with a velocity and momentum continually increasing, till he arrived in Olney. I had been in bed about ten minutes, when I heard the most uncommon and unaccountable noise that can be imagined. It was, in fact, occasioned by the clattering of tin pattypans and a Dutch oven against the sides of the panniers. Much gingerbread was picked up in the street, and Mr. Lucy's windows were broken all to pieces. Had this been all, it would have been a comedy, but we learned the next morning, that the poor woman's collar-bone was broken, and she has hardly been able to resume her occupation since.

What is added on the other side, if I could have persuaded myself to write sooner, would have reached you sooner; 'tis about ten days old. * * *

THE DOVES.*

The male dove was smoking a pipe, and the female dove was sewing, while she delivered herself as above. This little circumstance may lead you perhaps to guess what pair I had in my eye.

Yours, dear madam,

W. C.

* Vide Cowper's Poems.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, June 8, 1780.

My dear Friend—It is possible I might have indulged myself in the pleasure of writing to you, without waiting for a letter from you, but for a reason which you will not easily guess. Your mother communicated to me the satisfaction you expressed in my correspondence, that you thought me entertaining, and clever, and so forth. Now you must know I love praise dearly, especially from the judicious, and those who have so much delicacy themselves as not to offend mine in giving it. But then, I found this consequence attending, or likely to attend, the eulogium you bestowed—if my friend thought me witty before, he shall think me ten times more witty hereafter—where I joked once, I will joke five times, and, for one sensible remark, I will send him a dozen. Now this foolish vanity would have spoiled me quite, and would have made me as disgusting a letter-writer as Pope, who seems to have thought that unless a sentence was well-turned, and every period pointed with some conceit, it was not worth the carriage. Accordingly he is to me, except in a very few instances, the most disagreeable maker of epistles that ever I met with. I was willing therefore to wait till the impression your commendation had made upon the foolish part of me was worn off, that I might scribble away as usual, and write my uppermost thoughts, and those only.

You are better skilled in ecclesiastical law than I am.—Mrs. P. desires me to inform her, whether a parson can be obliged to take an apprentice. For some of her husband's opposers, at D——, threaten to clap one upon him. Now I think it would be rather hard if clergymen, who are not allowed to exercise any handicraft whatever, should be subject to such an imposition. If Mr. P. was a cordwainer or a breeches-maker all the week, and a preacher only on Sundays, it would seem reasonable enough in that case that he should take an apprentice if he chose it. But even then, in my poor judgment, he ought to be left to his option. If they mean by an apprentice a pupil whom they will oblige him to hew into a parson, and, after chipping away the block that hides the minister within, to qualify him to stand erect in a pulpit—that, indeed, is another consideration. But still we live in a free country, and I cannot bring myself even to suspect that an English divine can possibly be liable to such compulsion. Ask your uncle, however; for he is wiser in these things than either of us.

I thank you for your two inscriptions, and like the last the best; the thought is just and fine—but the two last lines are sadly damaged by the monkish jingle of *peperit* and *reperit*. I have not yet translated them, nor do I promise to do it, though at some idle hour perhaps I may. In return, I send you a translation of a simile in the Paradise Lost. Not having that poem at hand, I cannot refer you to the book and page, but you may hunt for it, if you think it worth your while. It begins—

"So when from mountain tops the dusky clouds
Ascending," &c.

Quales aërii montis de vertice nubes
Cum surgunt, et jam Boreæ tumida ora quiêrunt,
Cælum hilares abdit, spissâ caligine, vultus:
Tùm si jucundo tandem sol prodeat ore,
Et croceo montes et pascua lumine tingat,
Gaudent omnia, aves mulcent concentibus agros,
Balatuque ovium colles, vallesque resultant.

If you spy any fault in my Latin tell me, for I am sometimes in doubt; but, as I told you when you was here, I have not a Latin book in the world to consult, or correct a mistake by, and some years have past since I was a school-boy.

AN ENGLISH VERSIFICATION OF A THOUGHT THAT POPPED INTO MY HEAD ABOUT TWO MONTHS SINCE.

Sweet stream! that winds through yonder glade—
Apt emblem of a virtuous maid!—
Silent, and chaste, she steals along,
Far from the world's gay, busy throng,
With gentle yet prevailing force,
Intent upon her destin'd course:
Graceful and useful all she does,
Blessing and blest where'er she goes;
Pure-bosomed, as that watery glass,
And heav'n reflected in her face!

Now this is not so exclusively applicable to a maiden as to be the sole property of your sister Shuttleworth. If you look at Mrs. Unwin, you will see that she has not lost her right to this just praise by marrying you.

Your mother sends her love to all, and mine comes jogging along by the side of it.

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, June 12, 1780.

Dear Sir—We accept it as an effort of your friendship, that you could prevail with yourself, in a time of such terror and distress, to send us repeated accounts of yours and Mrs. Newton's welfare. You supposed, with reason enough, that we should be apprehensive for your safety, situated as you were, apparently within the reach of so much danger. We rejoice that you have escaped it all, and that, except the anxiety which you must have felt both for yourselves and others, you have suffered nothing upon this dreadful occasion. A metropolis in flames, and a nation in ruins, are subjects of contemplation for such a mind as yours, that will leave a lasting impression behind them.* It is well

* The event here alluded to was a crisis of great national danger. It originated in the concessions granted by Parliament to the Roman Catholics, in consequence of which a licentious mob assembled in great multitudes in St. George's Fields, and excited the greatest alarm by their unbridled fury. They proceeded to destroy all the Romish chapels in London and its vicinity. The prisons of Newgate, the Fleet, and King's Bench, were attacked, and exposed to the devouring flame. The Bank itself was threatened with an assault, when a well-disciplined band, called the London Association, aided by the regular troops, dispersed the multitude, but not without the slaughter of about two hundred and twenty of the most active ringleaders. The whole city presented a melancholy scene of riot and devastation; and the houses of many private individuals were involved in the ruin. The house of Lord Chief Justice Mansfield was the particular object of popular fury. Lord George Gordon, who acted a prominent part on this oc-

that the design died in the execution, and will be buried, I hope, never to rise again, in the ashes of its own combustion. There is a melancholy pleasure in looking back upon such a scene, arising from a comparison of possibilities with facts; the enormous bulk of the intended mischief, with the abortive and partial accomplishment of it; much was done, more indeed than could have been supposed practicable in a well-regulated city, not unfurnished with a military force for its protection. But surprise and astonishment seem, at first, to have struck every nerve of the police with a palsy, and to have disarmed government of all its powers.

I congratulate you upon the wisdom that withheld you from entering yourself a member of the Protestant Association. Your friends who did so have reason enough to regret their doing it, even though they should never be called upon. Innocent as they are, and they who know them cannot doubt of their being perfectly so, it is likely to bring an odium on the profession they make that will not soon be forgotten. Neither is it possible for a quiet inoffensive man to discover on a sudden that his zeal has carried him into such company, without being to the

casion, was afterwards brought to trial, and his defence undertaken by Mr. Kenyon, afterwards well known by the title of Lord Kenyon. Various facts and circumstances having been adduced in favour of Lord George Gordon, his lordship was acquitted. It is instructive to contemplate the tide of human passions and events, and to contrast this spirit of religious persecution with the final removal of Catholic disabilities at a later period.

last degree shocked at his imprudence. *Their* religion was an honourable mantle, like that of Elijah, but the majority wore cloaks of Guy Fawkes's time, and meant nothing so little as what they pretended

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, June 18, 1780.

Reverend and dear William—The affairs of kingdoms and the concerns of individuals are variegated alike with the chequer-work of joy and sorrow. The news of a great acquisition in America has succeeded to terrible tumults in London, and the beams of prosperity are now playing upon the smoke of that conflagration which so lately terrified the whole land. These sudden changes, which are matter of every man's observation, and may therefore always be reasonably expected, serve to hold up the chin of despondency above water, and preserve mankind in general from the sin and misery of accounting existence a burden not to be endured—an evil we should be sure to encounter, if we were not warranted to look for a bright reverse of our most afflictive experiences. The Spaniards were sick of the war at the very commencement of it; and I hope that by this time the French themselves begin to find themselves a little indisposed, if not desirous of peace, which that restless and meddling temper of theirs is incapable of desiring for its own sake.

But is it true that this detestable plot was an egg laid in France, and hatched in London, under the influence of French corruption?—*Nam te scire, deos quoniam propiùs contingis, oportet.* The offspring has the features of such a parent, and yet, without the clearest proof of the fact, I would not willingly charge upon a civilized nation what perhaps the most barbarous would abhor the thought of. I no sooner saw the surmise, however, in the paper, than I immediately began to write Latin verses upon the occasion. "An odd effect," you will say, "of such a circumstance;"—but an effect, nevertheless, that whatever has at any time moved my passions, whether pleasantly or otherwise, has always had upon me. Were I to express what I feel upon such occasions in prose, it would be verbose, inflated, and disgusting. I therefore have recourse to verse, as a suitable vehicle for the most vehement expressions my thoughts suggest to me. What I have written, I did not write so much for the comfort of the English as for the mortification of the French. You will immediately perceive therefore that I have been labouring in vain, and that this bouncing explosion is likely to spend itself in the air. For I have no means of circulating what follows through all the French territories; and unless that, or something like it, can be done, my indignation will be entirely fruitless. Tell me how I can convey it into Sartine's pocket, or who will lay it upon his desk for me. But read it first, and, unless you think it pointed enough to sting the Gaul to the quick, burn it.

IN SEDITIONEM HORRENDAM, CORRUPTELIS GALLICIS, UT FERTUR, LONDINI NUPER EXORTAM.

Perfida, crudelis, victa et lymphata furore,
Non armis, laurum Gallia fraude petit.
Venalem pretio plebem conducit, et urit
Undique privatas patriciasque domos.
Nequicquàm conata suà, fœdissima sperat
Posse tamen nostrâ nos superare manu.
Gallia, vana struis! Precibus nunc utere! Vinces,
Nam mites timidis, supplicibusque sumus.

I have lately exercised my ingenuity in contriving an exercise for yours, and have composed a riddle which, if it does not make you laugh before you have solved it, will probably do it afterwards. I would transcribe it now, but am really so fatigued with writing, that, unless I knew you had a quinsy, and that a fit of laughter might possibly save your life, I could not prevail with myself to do it.

What could you possibly mean, slender as you are, by sallying out upon your two walking sticks at two in the morning, in the midst of such a tumult? We admire your prowess, but cannot commend your prudence.

Our love attends you all, collectively and individually.

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, June 22, 1780.

My dear Friend—A word or two in answer to two or three questions of yours, which I have hitherto

taken no notice of. I am not in a scribbling mood, and shall therefore make no excursions to amuse either myself or you. The needful will be as much as I can manage at present—the playful must wait another opportunity.

I thank you for your offer of Robertson, but I have more reading upon my hands at this present writing than I shall get rid of in a twelvemonth, and this moment recollect that I have seen it already. He is an author that I admire much, with one exception that I think his style is too laboured. Hume, as an historian, pleases me more.

I have just read enough of the Biographia Britannica to say that I have tasted it, and have no doubt but I shall like it. I am pretty much in the garden at this season of the year, so read but little. In summer-time I am as giddy-headed as a boy, and can settle to nothing. Winter condenses me, and makes me lumpish and sober; and then I can read all day long.

For the same reasons, I have no need of the landscapes at present; when I want them I will renew my application, and repeat the description, but it will hardly be before October.

Before I rose this morning, I composed the three following Stanzas; I send them because I like them pretty well myself; and, if you should not, you must accept this handsome compliment as an amends for their deficiencies. You may print the lines, if you judge them worth it.*

* Verses on the burning of Lord Chief Justice Mansfield's house, during the riots in London.

I have only time to add love, &c. and my two initials.

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, June 23, 1780.

My dear Friend—Your reflections upon the state of London, the sins and enormities of that great city, while you had a distant view of it from Greenwich, seem to have been prophetic of the heavy stroke that fell upon it just after. Man often prophesies without knowing it—a spirit speaks by him, which is not his own, though he does not at that time suspect that he is under the influence of any other. Did he foresee what is always foreseen by Him who dictates, what he supposes to be his own, he would suffer by anticipation as well as by consequence, and wish perhaps as ardently for the happy ignorance to which he is at present so much indebted, as some have foolishly and inconsiderately done for a knowledge that would be but another name for misery.

And why have I said all this, especially to you who have hitherto said it to me? not because I had the least desire of informing a wiser man than myself, but because the observation was naturally suggested by the recollection of your letter, and that letter, though not the last, happened to be uppermost in my mind. I can compare this mind of mine to nothing that resembles it more than to a

board that is under the carpenter's plane, (I mean while I am writing to you,) the shavings are my uppermost thoughts; after a few strokes of the tool it acquires a new surface, this again upon a repetition of his task he takes off, and a new surface still succeeds: whether the shavings of the present day will be worth your acceptance, I know not; I am unfortunately made neither of cedar nor mahogany, but *Truncus ficulnus, inutile lignum*—consequently, though I should be planed till I am as thin as a wafer, it will be but rubbish to the last.

It is not strange that you should be the subject of a false report, for the sword of slander, like that of war, devours one as well as another; and a blameless character is particularly delicious to its unsparing appetite. But that you should be the object of such a report, you who meddle less with the designs of government than almost any man that lives under it, this is strange indeed. It is well, however, when they who account it good sport to traduce the reputation of another invent a story that refutes itself. I wonder they do not always endeavour to accommodate their fiction to the real character of the person; their tale would then, at least, have an air of probability, and it might cost a peaceable good man much more trouble to disprove it. But perhaps it would not be easy to discern what part of your conduct lies more open to such an attempt than another, or what it is that you either say or do, at any time, that presents a fair opportunity to the most ingenious slanderer to slip in a falsehood between your words or actions, that

shall seem to be of a piece with either. You hate compliment, I know, but by your leave, this is not one—it is a truth—worse and worse—now I have praised you indeed—well you must thank yourself for it, it was absolutely done without the least intention on my part, and proceeded from a pen, that, as far as I can remember, was never guilty of flattery, since I knew how to hold it. He that slanders me, paints me blacker than I am, and he that flatters me, whiter—they both daub me, and when I look in the glass of conscience, I see myself disguised by both—I had as lief my tailor should sew gingerbread-nuts on my coat instead of buttons as that any man should call my Bristol stone a diamond. The tailor's trick would not at all embellish my suit, nor the flatterer's make me at all the richer. I never make a present to my friend of what I dislike myself. Ergo, (I have reached the conclusion at last,) I did not mean to flatter you.

We have sent a petition to Lord Dartmouth, by this post, praying him to interfere in parliament in behalf of the poor lace-makers. I say we, because I have signed it.——Mr. G. drew it up. Mr. —— did not think it grammatical, therefore would not sign it. Yet I think, Priscian himself would have pardoned the manner for the sake of the matter. I dare say if his lordship does not comply with the prayer of it, it will not be because he thinks it of more consequence to write grammatically than that the poor should eat, but for some better reason.

My love to all under your roof.

Yours, W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, July 2, 1780.

Carissime, I am glad of your confidence, and have reason to hope I shall never abuse it. If you trust me with a secret, I am hermetically sealed; and if you call for the exercise of my judgment, such as it is, I am never freakish or wanton in the use of it, much less mischievous and malignant. Critics, I believe, do not often stand so clear of those vices as I do. I like your epitaph, except that I doubt the propriety of the word *immaturus;* which, I think, is rather applicable to fruits than flowers, and except the last pentameter, the assertion it contains being rather too obvious a thought to finish with; not that I think an epitaph should be pointed like an epigram. But still there is a closeness of thought and expression necessary in the conclusion of all these little things, that they may leave an agreeable flavour upon the palate. Whatever is short should be nervous, masculine, and compact. Little men are so; and little poems should be so; because, where the work is short, the author has no right to the plea of weariness, and laziness is never admitted as an available excuse in any thing. Now you know my opinion, you will very likely improve upon my improvement, and alter my alterations for the better. To touch and retouch is, though some writers boast of negligence, and others would be ashamed to show their foul copies, the secret of almost all good writing, especially in verse. I am never weary of it myself, and, if you would take as

much pains as I do, you would have no need to ask for my corrections.

HIC SEPULTUS EST
INTER SUORUM LACRYMAS
GULIELMUS NORTHCOT,
GULIELMI ET MARIÆ FILIUS
UNICUS, UNICE DILECTUS,
QUI FLORIS RITU SUCCISUS EST SEMIHIANTIS,
APRILIS DIE SEPTIMO,
1780, ÆT. 10.

Care, vale! Sed non æternùm, care, valeto!
Namque iterùm tecum, sim modò dignus, ero.
Tum nihil amplexus poterit divellere nostros,
Nec tu marcesces, nec lacrymabor ego.*

Having an English translation of it by me, I send it, though it may be of no use.

Farewell! "But not for ever," Hope replies,
Trace but his steps, and meet him in the skies!
There nothing shall renew our parting pain,
Thou shalt not wither, nor I weep again.

The stanzas that I sent you are maiden ones, having never been seen by any eye but your mother's and your own.

If you send me franks, I shall write longer letters. —*Valete, sicut et nos valemus! Amate, sicut et nos amamus!*

W. C.

* These lines of Mr. Unwin, and here retouched by Cowper's pen, bear a strong resemblance to the beautiful Epitaph, composed by Bishop Lowth, on his daughter, beginning, Cara Maria, vale.—Ed.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, July 3, 1780.

Mon Ami—By this time, I suppose, you have ventured to take your fingers out of your ears, being delivered from the deafening shouts of the most zealous mob that ever strained their lungs in the cause of religion. I congratulate you upon a gentle relapse into the customary sounds of a great city, which, though we rustics abhor them, as noisy and dissonant, are a musical and sweet murmur, compared with what you have lately heard. The tinkling of a kennel may be distinguished now, where the roaring of a cascade would have been sunk and lost. I never suspected, till the newspapers informed me of it, a few days since, that the barbarous uproar had reached Great Queen Street. I hope Mrs. Hill was in the country, and shall rejoice to hear that, as I am sure you did not take up the protestant cudgels† upon this hair-brained occasion, so you have not been pulled in pieces as a papist.

W. C.

The next letter to Mr. Hill affords a striking proof of Cowper's compassionate feelings towards the poor around him.

* Private Correspondence.

† The alarm taken at the concessions made in favour of the Catholics was such, that many persons formed themselves into an association, for the defence of Protestant principles.—Ed.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, July 8, 1780.

Mon Ami—If you ever take the tip of the chancellor's ear between your finger and thumb, you can hardly improve the opportunity to better purpose, than if you should whisper into it the voice of compassion and lenity to the lace-makers. I am an eye-witness to their poverty, and do know that hundreds in this little town are upon the point of starving; and that the most unremitting industry is but barely sufficient to keep them from it. I know that the bill by which they would have been so fatally affected is thrown out, but Lord Stormont threatens them with another; and if another like it should pass, they are undone. We lately sent a petition to Lord Dartmouth; I signed it, and am sure the contents are true. The purport of it was to inform him, that there are very near one thousand two hundred lace-makers in this beggarly town, the most of whom had reason enough, while the bill was in agitation, to look upon every loaf they bought as the last they should ever be able to earn. I can never think it good policy to incur the certain inconvenience of ruining thirty thousand, in order to prevent a remote and possible damage, though to a much greater number. The measure is like a scythe, and the poor lace-makers are the sickly crop, that trembles before the edge of it. The prospect of a peace with America is like the streak of dawn in their horizon; but this bill is like a black cloud behind it, that

threatens their hope of a comfortable day with utter extinction.

I do not perceive till this moment, that I had tacked two similes together, a practice, which though warranted by the example of Homer, and allowed in an Epic Poem, is rather luxuriant and licentious in a letter; lest I should add another, I conclude.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, July 11, 1780.

I account myself sufficiently commended for my Latin exercise, by the number of translations it has undergone. That which you distinguished in the margin by the title of "better" was the production of a friend, and, except that, for a modest reason, he omitted the third couplet, I think it a good one. To finish the group, I have translated it myself; and, though I would not wish you to give it to the world, for more reasons than one, especially lest some French hero should call me to account for it, I add it on the other side. An author ought to be the best judge of his own meaning; and, whether I have succeeded or not, I cannot but wish, that where a translator is wanted, the writer was always to be his own.

False, cruel, disappointed, stung to the heart,
France quits the warrior's for the assassin's part;
To dirty hands a dirty bribe conveys,
Bids the low street and lofty palace blaze.

Her sons too weak to vanquish us alone,
She hires the worst and basest of our own.
Kneel, France! a suppliant conquers us with ease,
We always spare a coward on his knees.*

I have often wondered that Dryden's illustrious epigram on Milton, (in my mind the second best that ever was made) has never been translated into Latin, for the admiration of the learned in other countries. I have at last presumed to venture upon the task myself. The great closeness of the original, which is equal, in that respect, to the most compact Latin I ever saw, made it extremely difficult.

Tres tria, sed longè distantia, sæcula vates
Ostentant tribus è gentibus eximios.
Græcia sublimem, cum majestate disertum
Roma tulit, felix Anglia utrique parem.
Partubus ex binis Natura exhausta, coacta est,
Tertius ut fieret, conseciare duos.

I have not one bright thought upon the chancellor's recovery; nor can I strike off so much as one sparkling atom from that brilliant subject. It is not when I will, nor upon what I will, but as a thought happens to occur to me; and then I versify, whether I will or not. I never write but for my amusement; and what I write is sure to answer that end, if it answers no other. If, besides this purpose, the more desirable one of entertaining you be effected, I then receive double fruit of my labour, and consider this produce of it as a second crop,

* These lines are founded on the suspicion, prevalent at that time, that the fires in London were owing to French gold, circulated for the purposes of corruption.

the more valuable because less expected. But when I have once remitted a composition to you, I have done with it. It is pretty certain that I shall never read it or think of it again. From that moment I have constituted you sole judge of its accomplishments, if it has any, and of its defects, which it is sure to have.

For this reason I decline answering the question with which you concluded your last, and cannot persuade myself to enter into a critical examen of the two pieces upon Lord Mansfield's loss,* either with respect to their intrinsic or comparative merit, and, indeed, after having rather discouraged that use of them which you had designed, there is no occasion for it.

W. C

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.†

Olney, July 12, 1780.

My dear Friend—Such nights as I frequently spend are but a miserable prelude to the succeeding day, and indispose me above all things to the business of writing. Yet, with a pen in my hand, if I am able to write at all, I find myself gradually relieved; and as I am glad of any employment

* Lord Chief Justice Mansfield incurred the loss, on this occasion, of one of the most complete and valuable collections of law books ever known, together with manuscripts and legal remarks, the result of his own industry and professional knowledge.

† Private Correspondence.

that may serve to engage my attention, so especially I am pleased with an opportunity of conversing with you, though it be but upon paper. This occupation above all others assists me in that self-deception to which I am indebted for all the little comfort I enjoy; things seem to be as they were, and I almost forget that they never can be so again.

We are both obliged to you for a sight of Mr. ——'s letter. The friendly and obliging manner of it will much enhance the difficulty of answering it. I think I can see plainly that, though he does not hope for your applause, he would gladly escape your censure. He seems to approach you smoothly and softly, and to take you gently by the hand, as if he bespoke your lenity, and entreated you at least to spare him. You have such skill in the management of your pen that I doubt not you will be able to send him a balmy reproof, that shall give him no reason to complain of a broken head. How delusive is the wildest speculation, when pursued with eagerness, and nourished with such arguments as the perverted ingenuity of such a mind as his can easily furnish! Judgment falls asleep upon the bench, while Imagination, like a smug, pert counsellor, stands chattering at the bar, and, with a deal of fine-spun, enchanting sophistry, carries all before him.

If I had strength of mind, I have not strength of body for the task which, you say, some would impose upon me. I cannot bear much thinking. The

meshes of that fine net-work, the brain, are composed of such mere spinners' threads in me, that when a long thought finds its way into them, it buzzes, and twangs, and bustles about at such a rate as seems to threaten the whole contexture. No—I must needs refer it again to you.

My enigma will probably find you out, and you will find out my enigma, at some future time. I am not in a humour to transcribe it now. Indeed I wonder that a sportive thought should ever knock at the door of my intellects, and still more that it should gain admittance. It is as if harlequin should intrude himself into the gloomy chamber where a corpse is deposited in state. His antic gesticulations would be unseasonable at any rate, but more especially so if they should distort the features of the mournful attendants into laughter. But the mind, long wearied with the sameness of a dull, dreary prospect, will gladly fix its eyes on any thing that may make a little variety in its contemplations, though it were but a kitten playing with her tail.

You would believe, though I did not say it at the end of every letter, that we remember you and Mrs. Newton with the same affection as ever; but I would not therefore excuse myself from writing what it gives you pleasure to read. I have often wished indeed, when writing to an ordinary correspondent, for the revival of the Roman custom—*salutis* at top, and *vale* at bottom. But as the French have taught all Europe to enter a room and to leave it

with a most ceremonious bow, so they have taught us to begin and conclude our letters in the same manner. However, I can say to you,

Sans ceremonie,

Adieu, *mon ami!*

W. C.

The poet's affectionate effort in renewing his correspondence with Mrs. Cowper, to whom he had been accustomed to pour forth his heart without reserve, appears to have had a beneficial effect on his reviving spirits. His pathetic letter to that lady was followed, in the course of two months, by a letter of a more lively cast, in which the reader will find some touches of his native humour, and a vein of pleasantry peculiar to himself.

TO MRS. COWPER.

July 20, 1780.

My dear Cousin—Mr. Newton having desired me to be of the party, I am come to meet him. You see me sixteen years older, at the least, than when I saw you last; but the effects of time seem to have taken place rather on the outside of my head than within it. What was brown is become grey, but what was foolish remains foolish still. Green fruit must rot before it ripens, if the season is such as to afford it nothing but cold winds and dark clouds, that interrupt every ray of sunshine. My days steal away silently, and march on (as poor mad Lear would have made his soldiers march) as

if they were shod with felt; not so silently but that I hear them: yet were it not that I am always listening to their flight, having no infirmity that I had not when I was much younger, I should deceive myself with an imagination that I am still young.

I am fond of writing as an amusement, but do not always find it one. Being rather scantily furnished with subjects that are good for any thing, and corresponding only with those who have no relish for such as are good for nothing, I often find myself reduced to the necessity, the disagreeable necessity, of writing about myself. This does not mend the matter much, for, though in a description of my own condition, I discover abundant materials to employ my pen upon, yet as the task is not very agreeable to *me*, so I am sufficiently aware, that it is likely to prove irksome to others. A painter who should confine himself, in the exercise of his art, to the drawing of his own picture, must be a wonderful coxcomb if he did not soon grow sick of his occupation, and be peculiarly fortunate if he did not make others as sick as himself.

Remote as your dwelling is from the late scene of riot and confusion, I hope that, though you could not but hear the report, you heard no more, and that the roarings of the mad multitude did not reach you. That was a day of terror to the innocent, and the present is a day of still greater terror to the guilty. The law was, for a few moments, like an arrow in the quiver, seemed to be of no use, and did no execution; now it is an arrow upon the

string, and many who despised it lately are trembling as they stand before the point of it.

I have talked more already than I have formerly done in three visits—you remember my taciturnity, never to be forgotten by those who knew me; not to depart entirely from what might be, for aught I know, the most shining part of my character, I here shut my mouth, make my bow, and return to Olney.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, July 27, 1780.

My dear Friend—As two men sit silent, after having exhausted all their topics of conversation; one says, "It is very fine weather," and the other says "Yes;"—one blows his nose, and the other rubs his eye-brows; (by the way, this is very much in Homer's manner;) such seems to be the case between you and me. After a silence of some days, I wrote you a long something, that (I suppose) was nothing to the purpose, because it has not afforded you materials for an answer. Nevertheless, as it often happens in the case above-stated, one of the distressed parties, being deeply sensible of the awkwardness of a dumb duet, breaks silence again, and resolves to speak, though he has nothing to say, so it fares with me. I am with you again in the form of an epistle, though, considering my present emptiness, I have reason to fear that your only joy

upon the occasion will be, that it is conveyed to you in a frank.

When I began, I expected no interruption. But, if I had expected interruptions without end, I should have been less disappointed. First came the barber; who, after having embellished the outside of my head, has left the inside just as unfurnished as he found it. Then came Olney bridge, not into the house, but into the conversation. The cause relating to it was tried on Tuesday at Buckingham. The judge directed the jury to find a verdict favourable to Olney. The jury consisted of one knave and eleven fools. The last-mentioned followed the afore-mentioned as sheep follow a bell-wether, and decided in direct opposition to the said judge: then a flaw was discovered in the indictment:—the indictment was quashed, and an order made for a new trial. The new trial will be in the King's Bench, where said knave and said fools will have nothing to do with it. So the men of Olney fling up their caps, and assure themselves of a complete victory. A victory will save me and your mother many shillings, perhaps some pounds, which, except that it has afforded me a subject to write upon, was the only reason why I said so much about it. I know you take an interest in all that concerns us, and will consequently rejoice with us in the prospect of an event in which we are concerned so nearly.

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, July 30, 1780.

My dear Sir—You may think perhaps that I deal more liberally with Mr. Unwin, in the way of poetical export, than I do with you, and I believe you have reason:—the truth is this—if I walked the streets with a fiddle under my arm, I should never think of performing before the window of a privy councillor or a chief justice, but should rather make free with ears more likely to be open to such amusement. The trifles I produce in this way are indeed such trifles that I cannot think them seasonable presents for you. Mr. Unwin himself would not be offended if I was to tell him that there is this difference between him and Mr. Newton,—that the latter is already an apostle, while he himself is only undergoing the business of incubation, with a hope that he may be hatched in time. When my Muse comes forth arrayed in sables, at least in a robe of graver cast, I make no scruple to direct her to my friend at Hoxton. This has been one reason why I have so long delayed the riddle. But lest I should seem to set a value upon it that I do not, by making it an object of still further inquiry, here it comes.

I am just two and two, I am warm, I am cold,
And the parent of numbers that cannot be told,
I am lawful, unlawful—a duty, a fault,
I am often sold dear, good for nothing when bought,
An extraordinary boon, and a matter of course,
And yielded with pleasure—when taken by force.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Aug. 6, 1780.

My dear Friend—You like to hear from me—this is a very good reason why I should write—but I have nothing to say—this seems equally a good reason why I should not; yet if you had alighted from your horse at our door this morning, and, at this present writing, being five o'clock in the afternoon, had found occasion to say to me——"Mr. Cowper, you have not spoke since I came in; have you resolved never to speak again?"—it would be but a poor reply, if in answer to the summons I should plead inability as my best and only excuse. And this, by the way, suggests to me a seasonable piece of instruction, and reminds me of what I am very apt to forget when I have any epistolary business in hand; that a letter may be written upon anything or nothing, just as that anything or nothing happens to occur. A man that has a journey before him twenty miles in length, which he is to perform on foot, will not hesitate and doubt whether he shall set out or not, because he does not readily conceive how he shall ever reach the end of it; for he knows that, by the simple operation of moving one foot forward first and then the other, he shall be sure to accomplish it. So it is in the present case, and so it is in every similar case. A letter is written, as a conversation is maintained or a journey performed, not by preconcerted or premeditated means, a new contrivance, or an invention never heard of before, but merely by maintaining a progress, and resolving, as a postilion

does, having once set out, never to stop till we reach the appointed end. If a man may talk without thinking, why may he not write upon the same terms? A grave gentleman of the last century, a tie-wig, square-toe, Steinkirk figure, would say, "My good sir, a man has no right to do either." But it is to be hoped that the present century has nothing to do with the mouldy opinions of the last; and so, good Sir Launcelot, or St. Paul, or whatever be your name, step into your picture frame again, and look as if you thought for another century, and leave us moderns in the mean time to think when we can, and to write whether we can or not, else we might as well be dead as you are.

When we look back upon our forefathers, we seem to look back upon the people of another nation, almost upon creatures of another species. Their vast rambling mansions, spacious halls, and painted casements, the gothic porch, smothered with honeysuckles, their little gardens, and high walls, their box-edgings, balls of holly, and yew-tree statues, are become so entirely unfashionable now, that we can hardly believe it possible that a people who resembled us so little in their taste should resemble us in any thing else. But in every thing else I suppose they were our counterparts exactly, and time, that has sewed up the slashed sleeve, and reduced the large trunk hose to a neat pair of silk stockings, has left human nature just where it found it. The inside of the man at least has undergone no change. His passions, appetites, and aims are just

what they ever were. They wear perhaps a handsomer disguise than they did in the days of yore, for philosophy and literature will have their effect upon the exterior; but in every other respect a modern is only an ancient in a different dress.

Yours,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, Aug. 10, 1780.

My dear Sir—I greet you at your castle of Buen Retiro, and wish you could enjoy the unmixed pleasures of the country there. But it seems you are obliged to dash the cup with a portion of those bitters you are always swallowing in town. Well—you are honourably and usefully employed, and ten times more beneficially to society than if you were piping to a few sheep under a spreading beech, or listening to a tinkling rill. Besides, by the effect of long custom and habitual practice, you are not only enabled to endure your occupation, but even find it agreeable. I remember the time when it would not have suited you so well to have devoted so large a part of your vacation to the objects of your profession; and you, I dare say, have not forgot what a seasonable relaxation you found, when lying at full stretch upon the ruins of an old wall, by the sea side, you amused yourself with

* Private Correspondence.

Tasso's Jerusalem and the Pastor Fido. I recollect that we both pitied Mr. De Grey, when we called at his cottage at Taplow, and found, not the master indeed, but his desk, with his white-leaved folio upon it, which bespoke him as much a man of business in his retirement as in Westminster Hall. But by these steps he ascended the bench.* Now he may read what he pleases, and ride where he will, if the gout will give him leave. And you, who have no gout and probably never will, when your hour of dismission comes, will, for that reason, if for no other, be a happier man than he.

I am, my dear friend,
Affectionately yours,
W. C.

P. S. Mr. ——— has not thought proper to favour me with his book, and, having no interest in the subject, I have not thought proper to purchase it. Indeed I have no curiosity to read what I am sure must be erroneous before I read it. Truth is worth every thing that can be given for it; but a mere display of ingenuity, calculated only to mislead, is worth nothing.

* This distinguished lawyer was a connexion of Cowper's, having married Mary, daughter of William Cowper, of the Park, near Hertford, Esq. After having successively passed through the offices of Solicitor and Attorney General, he was advanced to the dignity of Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, and subsequently elevated to the Peerage by the title of Baron Walsingham.

The following letter shows the sportiveness of his imagination on the minutest subjects.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

Olney, August 21, 1780.

The following occurrence ought not to be passed over in silence, in a place where so few notable ones are to be met with. Last Wednesday night, while we were at supper, between the hours of eight and nine, I heard an unusual noise in the back parlour, as if one of the hares was entangled and endeavouring to disengage herself. I was just going to rise from table when it ceased. In about five minutes a voice on the outside of the parlour door inquired if one of my hares had got away. I immediately rushed into the next room, and found that my poor favourite puss had made her escape. She had gnawed in sunder the strings of a lattice work, with which I thought I had sufficiently secured the window, and which I preferred to any other sort of blind, because it admitted plenty of air. From thence I hastened to the kitchen, where I saw the redoubtable Thomas Freeman, who told me that, having seen her just after she dropped into the street, he attempted to cover her with his hat, but she screamed out and leaped directly over his head. I then desired him to pursue as fast as possible, and added Richard Coleman to the chace, as being nimbler and carrying less weight than Thomas; not expecting to see her again, but desirous to learn, if possible, what became of her. In some-

thing less than an hour, Richard returned, almost breathless, with the following account: that, soon after he began to run, he left Tom behind him and came in sight of a most numerous hunt of men, women, children, and dogs; that he did his best to keep back the dogs, and presently outstripped the crowd, so that the race was at last disputed between himself and puss: she ran right through the town, and down the lane that leads to Dropshot. A little before she came to the house, he got the start and turned her; she pushed for the town again, and soon after she entered it sought shelter in Mr. Wagstaff's tan-yard, adjoining to old Mr. Drake's. Sturges's harvest men were at supper, and saw her from the opposite side of the way. There she encountered the tan-pits full of water, and, while she was struggling out of one pit, and plunging into another, and almost drowned, one of the men drew her out by the ears, and secured her. She was then well washed in a bucket to get the lime out of her coat, and brought home in a sack at ten o'clock.

This frolic cost us four shillings, but you may believe that we did not grudge a farthing of it. The poor creature received only a little hurt in one of her claws and one of her ears, and is now almost as well as ever.

I do not call this an answer to your letter, but such as it is I send it, presuming upon that interest which I know you take in my minutest concerns, which I cannot express better than in the

words of Terence, a little varied—*Nihil mei a te alienum putas.*

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER.

Olney, August 31, 1780.

My dear Cousin—I am obliged to you for your long letter, which did not seem so, and for your short one, which was more than I had any reason to expect. Short as it was, it conveyed to me two interesting articles of intelligence,—an account of your recovering from a fever, and of Lady Cowper's death. The latter was, I suppose, to be expected, for, by what remembrance I have of her Ladyship, who was never much acquainted with her, she had reached those years that are always found upon the borders of another world. As for you, your time of life is comparatively of a youthful date. You may think of death as much as you please, (you cannot think of it too much,) but I hope you will live to think of it many years.

It costs me not much difficulty to suppose that my friends, who were already grown old when I saw them last, are old still, but it costs me a good deal sometimes to think of those who were at that time young as being older than they were. Not having been an eye-witness of the change that time has made in them, and my former idea of them not being corrected by observation, it remains the same; my memory presents me with this image

unimpaired, and, while it retains the resemblance of what they were, forgets that by this time the picture may have lost much of its likeness, through the alteration that succeeding years have made in the original. I know not what impressions Time may have made upon your person, for while his claws (as our grannams called them) strike deep furrows in some faces, he seems to sheath them with much tenderness, as if fearful of doing injury, to others. But, though an enemy to the person, he is a friend to the mind, and you have found him so; though even in this respect his treatment of us depends upon what he meets with at our hands: if we use him well, and listen to his admonitions, he is a friend indeed, but otherwise the worst of enemies, who takes from us daily something that we valued, and gives us nothing better in its stead. It is well with them, who, like you, can stand a-tiptoe on the mountain-top of human life, look down with pleasure upon the valley they have passed, and sometimes stretch their wings in joyful hope of a happy flight into eternity. Yet a little while, and your hope will be accomplished.

When you can favour me with a little account of your own family, without inconvenience, I shall be glad to receive it, for, though separated from my kindred by little more than half a century of miles, I know as little of their concerns as if oceans and continents were interposed between us.

Yours, my dear cousin,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Sept. 3, 1780.

My dear Friend—I am glad you are so provident, and that, while you are young, you have furnished yourself with the means of comfort in old age. Your crutch and your pipe may be of use to you, (and may they be so!) should your years be extended to an antediluvian date; and, for your perfect accommodation, you seem to want nothing but a clerk called Snuffle, and a sexton of the name of Skeleton, to make your ministerial equipage complete.

I think I have read as much of the first volume of the Biographia as I shall ever read. I find it very amusing; more so, perhaps, than it would have been, had they sifted their characters with more exactness, and admitted none but those who had in some way or other entitled themselves to immortality by deserving well of the public. Such a compilation would perhaps have been more judicious, though I confess it would have afforded less variety. The priests and monks of earlier and the doctors of later days, who have signalized themselves by nothing but a controversial pamphlet, long since thrown by and never to be perused again, might have been forgotten, without injury or loss to the national character for learning or genius. This observation suggested to me the following lines, which may serve to illustrate my meaning,

and at the same time to give my criticism a sprightlier air.

> O fond attempt to give a deathless lot
> To names ignoble, born to be forgot!
> In vain recorded in historic page,
> They court the notice of a future age,
> Those twinkling, tiny lustres of the land,
> Drop one by one, from Fame's neglecting hand;
> Lethean gulphs receive them as they fall,
> And dark Oblivion soon absorbs them all
> So, when a child (as playful children use)
> Has burnt to cinder a stale last year's news,
> The flame extinct, he views the roving fire,
> There goes my lady, and there goes the 'squire,
> There goes the parson—O illustrious spark!
> And there—scarce less illustrious—goes the clerk!

Virgil admits none but worthies into the Elysian fields; I cannot recollect the lines in which he describes them all, but these in particular I well remember:

> Quique sui memores alios fecere merendo,
> Inventas aut qui vitam excoluère per artes.

A chaste and scrupulous conduct like this would well become the writer of national biography. But enough of this.

Our respects attend Miss Shuttleworth, with many thanks for her intended present. Some purses derive all their value from their contents, but these will have an intrinsic value of their own; and, though mine should be often empty, which is not an improbable supposition, I shall still esteem it highly on its own account.

If you could meet with a second-hand Virgil, ditto Homer, both Iliad and Odyssey, together with a Clavis, for I have no Lexicon, and all tolerably cheap, I shall be obliged to you if you will make the purchase.

Yours,

W. C.

The three following letters are interesting, as containing Cowper's sentiments on the subject of education.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Sept. 7, 1780.

My dear Friend—As many gentlemen as there are in the world, who have children, and heads capable of reflecting upon the important subject of their education, so many opinions there are about it, and many of them just and sensible, though almost all differing from each other. With respect to the education of boys, I think they are generally made to draw in Latin and Greek trammels too soon. It is pleasing no doubt to a parent to see his child already in some sort a proficient in those languages, at an age when most others are entirely ignorant of them; but hence it often happens that a boy, who could construe a fable of Æsop at six or seven years of age, having exhausted his little stock of attention and diligence in making that notable acquisition, grows weary of his task, conceives a dislike for study, and perhaps makes but a very

indifferent progress afterwards. The mind and body have, in this respect, a striking resemblance to each other. In childhood they are both nimble, but not strong; they can skip, and frisk about with wonderful agility, but hard labour spoils them both. In maturer years they become less active, but more vigorous, more capable of a fixed application, and can make themselves sport with that which a little earlier would have affected them with intolerable fatigue. I should recommend it to you, therefore, (but after all you must judge for yourself,) to allot the two next years of little John's scholarship to writing and arithmetic, together with which, for variety's sake, and because it is capable of being formed into an amusement, I would mingle geography, (a science which, if not attended to betimes, is seldom made an object of much consideration,) essentially necessary to the accomplishment of a gentleman, yet, as I know (by sad experience) imperfectly, if at all, inculcated in the schools. Lord Spencer's son, when he was four years of age, knew the situation of every kingdom, country, city, river, and remarkable mountain in the world. For this attainment, which I suppose his father had never made, he was indebted to a plaything; having been accustomed to amuse himself with those maps which are cut into several compartments, so as to be thrown into a heap of confusion, that they may be put together again with an exact coincidence of all their angles and bearings, so as to form a perfect whole.

If he begins Latin and Greek at eight, or even at

nine years of age, it is surely soon enough. Seven years, the usual allowance for these acquisitions, are more than sufficient for the purpose, especially with his readiness in learning; for you would hardly wish to have him qualified for the university before fifteen, a period in my mind much too early for it, and when he could hardly be trusted there without the utmost danger to his morals. Upon the whole, you will perceive that, in my judgment, the difficulty, as well as the wisdom, consists more in bridling in and keeping back a boy of his parts than in pushing him forward. If therefore, at the end of the two next years, instead of putting a grammar into his hand, you should allow him to amuse himself with some agreeable writers upon the subject of natural philosophy for another year, I think it would answer well. There is a book called Cosmotheoria Puerilis, there are Derham's Physico and Astro-theology, together with several others in the same manner, very intelligible even to a child and full of useful instruction.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Sept. 17, 1780.

My dear Friend—You desire my further thoughts on the subject of education. I send you such as had for the most part occurred to me when I wrote last, but could not be comprised in a single letter. They are indeed on a differ-

ent branch of this interesting theme, but not less important than the former.

I think it your happiness, and wish you to think it so yourself, that you are in every respect qualified for the task of instructing your son, and preparing him for the university, without committing him to the care of a stranger. In my judgment, a domestic education deserves the preference to a public one, on a hundred accounts, which I have neither time nor room to mention. I shall only touch upon two or three, that I cannot but consider as having a right to your most earnest attention.

In a public school, or indeed in any school, his morals are sure to be but little attended to, and his religion not at all. If he can catch the love of virtue from the fine things that are spoken of it in the classics, and the love of holiness from the customary attendance upon such preaching as he is likely to hear, it will be well; but I am sure you have had too many opportunities to observe the inefficacy of such means to expect any such advantage from them. In the mean time, the more powerful influence of bad example and perhaps bad company, will continually counterwork these only preservatives he can meet with, and may possibly send him home to you, at the end of five or six years, such as you will be sorry to see him. You escaped indeed the contagion yourself, but a few instances of happy exemption from a general malady are not sufficient warrant to conclude that it is therefore not infectious, or may be encountered without danger.

You have seen too much of the world, and are a man of too much reflection, not to have observed, that in proportion as the sons of a family approach to years of maturity they lose a sense of obligation to their parents, and seem at last almost divested of that tender affection which the nearest of all relations seems to demand from them. I have often observed it myself, and have always thought I could sufficiently account for it, without laying all the blame upon the children. While they continue in their parents' house, they are every day obliged, and every day reminded how much it is their interest, as well as duty, to be obliging and affectionate in return. But at eight or nine years of age, the boy goes to school. From that moment he becomes a stranger in his father's house. The course of parental kindness is interrupted. The smiles of his mother, those tender admonitions, and the solicitous care of both his parents, are no longer before his eyes——year after year he feels himself more and more detached from them, till at last he is so effectually weaned from the connexion, as to find himself happier any where than in their company.

I should have been glad of a frank for this letter, for I have said but little of what I could say upon the subject, and perhaps I may not be able to catch it by the end again. If I can, I shall add to it hereafter.

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Oct. 5, 1780.

My dear Friend—Now for the sequel—you have anticipated one of my arguments in favour of a private education, therefore I need say but little about it. The folly of supposing that the mother-tongue, in some respects the most difficult of all tongues, may be acquired without a teacher, is predominant in all the public schools that I have ever heard of. To pronounce it well, to speak and to write it with fluency and elegance, are no easy attainments; not one in fifty of those who pass through Westminster and Eton arrive at any remarkable proficiency in these accomplishments; and they that do, are more indebted to their own study and application for it than to any instruction received there. In general, there is nothing so pedantic as the style of a school-boy, if he aims at any style at all; and if he does not, he is of course inelegant and perhaps ungrammatical—a defect, no doubt, in great measure owing to want of cultivation, for the same lad that is often commended for his Latin frequently would deserve to be whipped for his English, if the fault were not more his master's than his own. I know not where this evil is so likely to be prevented as at home—supposing always, nevertheless, (which is the case in your instance,) that the boy's parents and their acquaintance are persons of elegance and taste themselves. For, to converse with those who converse with pro-

priety, and to be directed to such authors as have refined and improved the language by their productions, are advantages which he cannot elsewhere enjoy in an equal degree. And though it requires some time to regulate the taste and fix the judgment, and these effects must be gradually wrought even upon the best understanding, yet I suppose much less time will be necessary for the purpose than could at first be imagined, because the opportunities of improvement are continual.

A public education is often recommended as the most effectual remedy for that bashful and awkward restraint, so epidemical among the youth of our country. But I verily believe that, instead of being a cure, it is often the cause of it. For seven or eight years of his life, the boy has hardly seen or conversed with a man, or a woman, except the maids at his boarding-house. A gentleman, or a lady, are consequently such novelties to him that he is perfectly at a loss to know what sort of behaviour he should preserve before them. He plays with his buttons or the strings of his hat; he blows his nose, and hangs down his head, is conscious of his own deficiency to a degree that makes him quite unhappy, and trembles lest any one should speak to him, because that would quite overwhelm him. Is not all this miserable shyness the effect of his education? To me it appears to be so. If he saw good company every day, he would never be terrified at the sight of it, and a room full of ladies and gentlemen would alarm him no more than the chairs they sit on. Such is the effect of custom.

I need add nothing further on this subject, because I believe little John is as likely to be exempted from this weakness as most young gentlemen we shall meet with. He seems to have his father's spirit in this respect, in whom I could never discern the least trace of bashfulness, though I have often heard him complain of it. Under your management and the influence of your example, I think he can hardly fail to escape it. If he does, he escapes that which has made many a man uncomfortable for life, and ruined not a few, by forcing them into mean and dishonourable company, where only they could be free and cheerful.

Connexions formed at school are said to be lasting and often beneficial. There are two or three stories of this kind upon record, which would not be so constantly cited as they are, whenever this subject happens to be mentioned, if the chronicle that preserves their remembrance had many besides to boast of. For my own part, I found such friendships, though warm enough in their commencement, surprisingly liable to extinction; and of seven or eight, whom I had selected for intimates, out of about three hundred, in ten years' time not one was left me. The truth is, that there may be, and often is, an attachment of one boy to another that looks very like a friendship, and, while they are in circumstances that enable them mutually to oblige and to assist each other, promises well and bids fair to be lasting. But they are no sooner separated from each other, by entering into the world at large, than other connexions and new employ-

ments, in which they no longer share together, efface the remembrance of what passed in earlier days, and they become strangers to each other for ever. Add to this, the *man* frequently differs so much from the *boy;* his principles, manners, temper, and conduct, undergo so great an alteration, that we no longer recognize in him our old playfellow, but find him utterly unworthy, and unfit for the place he once held in our affections.

To close this article, as I did the last, by applying myself immediately to the present concern—little John is happily placed above all occasion for dependence on all such precarious hopes, and need not be sent to school in quest of some great men in embryo, who may possibly make his fortune.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO MRS. NEWTON.

Olney, Oct. 5, 1780.

Dear Madam—When a lady speaks, it is not civil to make her wait a week for an answer. I received your letter within this hour, and, foreseeing that the garden will engross much of my time for some days to come, have seized the present opportunity to acknowledge it. I congratulate you on Mr. Newton's safe arrival at Ramsgate, making no doubt but that he reached that place without difficulty or danger, the road thither from Canterbury being so good as to afford room for neither. He has

now a view of the element with which he was once familiar, but which, I think, he has not seen for many years. The sight of his old acquaintance will revive in his mind a pleasing recollection of past deliverances, and when he looks at him from the beach, he may say—"You have formerly given me trouble enough, but I have cast anchor now where your billows can never reach me."—It is happy for him that he can say so.

Mrs. Unwin returns you many thanks for your anxiety on her account. Her health is considerably mended upon the whole, so as to afford us a hope that it will be established.

Our love attends you.

Yours,

Dear madam,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Nov. 9, 1780.

I wrote the following last summer. The tragical occasion of it really happened at the next house to ours. I am glad when I can find a subject to work upon; a lapidary, I suppose, accounts it a laborious part of his business to rub away the roughness of the stone; but it is my amusement, and if, after all the polishing I can give it, it discovers some little lustre, I think myself well rewarded for my pains.*

* Verses on a Goldfinch, starved to death in a cage.

I shall charge you a halfpenny a piece for every copy I send you, the short as well as the long. This is a sort of afterclap you little expected, but I cannot possibly afford them at a cheaper rate. If this method of raising money had occurred to me sooner, I should have made the bargain sooner; but am glad I have hit upon it at last. It will be a considerable encouragement to my Muse, and act as a powerful stimulus to my industry. If the American war should last much longer, I may be obliged to raise my price; but this I shall not do without a real occasion for it—it depends much upon Lord North's conduct in the article of supplies—if he imposes an additional tax on any thing that I deal in, the necessity of this measure on my part will be so apparent that I dare say you will not dispute it.

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, Dec. 10, 1780.

My dear Friend—I am sorry that the bookseller shuffles off the trouble of package upon any body that belongs to you. I think I could cast him upon this point in an action upon the case, grounded upon the terms of his own undertaking. He engages to serve country customers. Ergo, as it would be unreasonable to expect that, when a country gentleman wants a book, he should order his chaise, and bid the man drive to Exeter Change; and as it is not probable that the book would find the way to him of itself, though it were the wisest that ever

* Private Correspondence.

was written, I should suppose the law would compel him. For I recollect it is a maxim of good authority in the courts, that there is no right without a remedy. And if another, or third person, should not be suffered to interpose between my right and the remedy the law gives me, where the right is invaded, much less, I apprehend, shall the man himself, who of his own mere motion gives me that right, be suffered to do it.

I never made so long an argument upon a law case before. I ask your pardon for doing it now. You have but little need of such entertainment.

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Dec. 21, 1780.

I thank you for your anecdote of Judge Carpenter. If it really happened, it is one of the best stories I ever heard; and if not, it has at least the merit of being *ben trovato*. We both very sincerely laughed at it, and think the whole Livery of London must have done the same; though I have known some persons, whose faces, as if they had been cast in a mould, could never be provoked to the least alteration of a single feature; so that you might as well relate a good story to a barber's block.

Non equidem invideo, miror magis.

Your sentiments with respect to me are exactly Mrs. Unwin's. She, like you, is perfectly sure of my deliverance, and often tells me so. I make but

* Private Correspondence.

one answer, and sometimes none at all. That answer gives *her* no pleasure, and would give *you* as little; therefore at this time I suppress it. It is better, on every account, that they who interest themselves so deeply in that event should believe the certainty of it, than that they should not. It is a comfort to *them* at least, if it is none to me; and as I could not if I would, so neither would I if I could, deprive them of it.

I annex a long thought in verse for your perusal. It was produced about last midsummer, but I never could prevail with myself, till now, to transcribe it.* You have bestowed some commendations on a certain poem now in the press, and they, I suppose, have at least animated me to the task. If human nature may be compared to a piece of tapestry, (and why not?) then human nature, as it subsists in me, though it is sadly faded on the right side, retains all its colour on the wrong. I am pleased with commendation, and though not passionately desirous of indiscriminate praise, or what is generally called popularity, yet when a judicious friend claps me on the back, I own I find it an encouragement. At this season of the year, and in this gloomy uncomfortable climate, it is no easy matter for the owner of a mind like mine to divert it from sad subjects, and fix it upon such as may administer to its amusement. Poetry, above all things, is useful to me in this respect. While I am held in pur-

* The Verses alluded to appear to have been separated from the letter.

suit of pretty images, or a pretty way of expressing them, I forget every thing that is irksome, and, like a boy that plays truant, determine to avail myself of the present opportunity to be amused, and to put by the disagreeable recollection that I must, after all, go home and be whipt again.

It will not be long, perhaps, before you will receive a poem called "The Progress of Error." That will be succeeded by another, in due time, called "Truth." Don't be alarmed. I ride Pegasus with a curb. He will never run away with me again. I have even convinced Mrs. Unwin that I can manage him, and make him stop when I please.

Yours,

W. C.

The following letter to Mr. Hill contains a poem already printed in the Works of Cowper; but the reader will probably be gratified in finding the sportiveness of Cowper's wit presented to him, as it was originally dispatched by the author for the amusement of a friend.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, December 25, 1780.

My dear Friend—Weary with rather a long walk in the snow, I am not likely to write a very sprightly letter, or to produce any thing that may cheer this gloomy season, unless I have recourse to my pocket-book, where perhaps I may find something to transcribe; something that was written before the sun had

taken leave of our hemisphere, and when I was less fatigued than I am at present.

Happy is the man who knows just so much of the law as to make himself a little merry now and then with the solemnity of juridical proceedings. I have heard of common law judgments before now, indeed have been present at the delivery of some, that, according to my poor apprehension, while they paid the utmost respect to the letter of the statute, have departed widely from the spirit of it, and, being governed entirely by the point of law, have left equity, reason, and common sense behind them at an infinite distance. You will judge whether the following report of a case, drawn up by myself, be not a proof and illustration of this satirical assertion.

NOSE, *Plaintiff.*—EYES, *Defendants.*

Between Nose and Eyes a sad contest arose;
The Spectacles set them unhappily wrong:
The point in dispute was, as all the world knows,
To which the said Spectacles ought to belong.

So the Tongue was the lawyer, and argued the cause,
With a great deal of skill, and a wig full of learning,
While Chief Baron Ear sat to balance the laws,
So fam'd for his talents at nicely discerning.

"In behalf of the Nose, it will quickly appear,
And your lordship," he said, "will undoubtedly find,
That the Nose has had spectacles always in wear,
Which amounts to possession, time out of mind."

Then holding the Spectacles up to the court,
"Your lordship observes, they are made with a straddle,
As wide as the ridge of the nose is, in short,
Design'd to sit close to it, just like a saddle.

"Again, would your lordship a moment suppose,
('Tis a case that has happen'd, and may be again,)
That the visage, or countenance, had not a nose,
Pray who would, or who could, wear Spectacles then?

"On the whole it appears, and my argument shows,
With a reasoning, the court will never condemn,
That the Spectacles plainly were made for the Nose,
And the Nose was as plainly intended for them."

Then shifting his side, as a lawyer knows how,
He pleaded again in behalf of the Eyes:
But what were his arguments few people know,
For the court did not think they were equally wise.

So his lordship decreed, with a grave, solemn tone,
Decisive and clear, without one if or but,
"That whenever the Nose put his Spectacles on
By day-light, or candle-light—Eyes should be shut!"

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Dec. 1780.

My dear Friend—Poetical reports of law cases are not very common, yet it seems to me desirable that they should be so. Many advantages would accrue from such a measure. They would, in the first place, be more commonly deposited in the memory, just as linen, grocery, or other such matters, when neatly packed, are known to occupy less room, and to lie more conveniently in any trunk, chest, or

box, to which they may be committed. In the next place, being divested of that infinite circumlocution, and the endless embarrassment in which they are involved by it, they would become surprisingly intelligible, in comparison with their present obscurity. And lastly, they would by this means be rendered susceptible of musical embellishment, and instead of being quoted in the country, with that dull monotony which is so wearisome to by-standers, and frequently lulls even the judges themselves to sleep, might be rehearsed in recitation; which would have an admirable effect, in keeping the attention fixed and lively, and could not fail to disperse that heavy atmosphere of sadness and gravity, which hangs over the jurisprudence of our country. I remember many years ago being informed by a relation of mine, who in his youth had applied himself to the study of the law, that one of his fellow-students, a gentleman of sprightly parts and very respectable talents of the poetical kind, did actually engage in the prosecution of such a design; for reasons, I suppose, somewhat similar to, if not the same, with those I have now suggested. He began with Coke's Institutes; a book so rugged in its style, that an attempt to polish it seemed an Herculean labour, and not less arduous and difficult than it would be to give the smoothness of a rabbit's fur to the prickly back of a hedgehog. But he succeeded to admiration, as you will perceive by the following specimen, which is all that my said relation could recollect of the performance.

Tenant in fee
Simple is he,
And need neither quake nor quiver,
Who hath his lands
Free from demands,
To him and his heirs for ever.

You have an ear for music, and a taste for verse, which saves me the trouble of pointing out, with a critical nicety, the advantages of such a version. I proceed, therefore, to what I at first intended, and to transcribe the record of an adjudged case thus managed, to which, indeed, what I premised was intended merely as an introduction.*

W. C.

The following year commences by a letter to his friend Mr. Newton, and alludes to his two poems entitled "The Progress of Error," and "Truth."

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.†

Jan. 21, 1781.

My dear Sir—I am glad that the "Progress of Error" did not err in its progress, as I feared it had, and that it has reached you safe; and still more pleased that it has met with your approbation; for, if it had not, I should have wished it had miscarried, and have been sorry that the bearer's memory had served him so well upon the occasion. I knew him to be that sort of genius, which, being much busied in making excursions of the imaginary

* This letter concluded with the poetical law case of Nose, plaintiff—Eyes, defendants, already inserted.

† Private Correspondence.

kind, is not always present to its own immediate concerns, much less to those of others; and, having reposed the trust in him, began to regret that I had done so, when it was too late. But I did it to save a frank, and, as the affair has turned out, that end was very well answered. This is committed to the hands of a less volatile person, and therefore more to be depended on.

As to the poem called "Truth," which is already longer than its elder brother, and is yet to be lengthened by the addition of perhaps twenty lines, perhaps more, I shrink from the thought of transcribing it at present. But, as there is no need to be in any hurry about it, I hope that, in some rainy season, which the next month will probably bring with it, when perhaps I may be glad of employment, the undertaking will appear less formidable.

You need not withhold from us any intelligence relating to yourselves, upon an apprehension that Mr. R—— has been beforehand with you upon those subjects, for we could get nothing out of him. I have known such travellers in my time, and Mrs. Newton is no stranger to one of them, who keep all their observations and discoveries to themselves, till they are extorted from them by mere dint of examination and cross-examination. He told us, indeed, that some invisible agent supplied you every Sunday with a coach, which we were pleased with hearing; and this, I think, was the sum total of his information.

We are much concerned for Mr. Barham's loss;*

* The loss of his excellent wife. Mr. Barham was the in-

but it is well for that gentleman, that those amiable features in his character, which most incline one to sympathize with him, are the very graces and virtues that will strengthen him to bear it with equanimity and patience. People that have neither his light nor experience will wonder that a disaster, which would perhaps have broken their hearts is not heavy enough to make any abatement in the cheerfulness of his.

Your books came yesterday. I shall not repeat to you what I said to Mrs. Unwin, after having read two or three of the letters. I admire the preface, in which you have given an air of novelty to a worn-out topic, and have actually engaged the favour of the reader by saying those things in a delicate and uncommon way, which in general are disgusting.

I suppose you know that Mr. Scott* will be in town on Tuesday. He is likely to take possession of the vicarage at last, with the best grace possible;

timate friend of Newton, and Cowper, and of the pious Lord Dartmouth, whose name is occasionally introduced in these letters in connexion with Olney, where his lordship's charity was liberally dispensed. Mr. Barham suggested the subject of many of the hymns that are inserted in the Olney collection, and particularly the one entitled "What think ye of Christ?" He was father of the late Jos. Foster Barham, Esq. many years M.P. for the borough of Stockbridge. The editor is happy in here bearing testimony to the profound piety and endearing virtues of a man, with whose family he became subsequently connected. He afterwards married the widow of Sir Rowland Hill, Bart, and lived at Hawkestone, in Shropshire.

* The late Rev. Thomas Scott, so well known and distinguished by his writings.

at least, if he and Mr. Browne can agree upon the terms.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.*

Olney, Feb. 6. 1781.

My dear Friend—Much good may your humanity do you, as it does so much good to others.† You can no where find objects more entitled to your pity than where your pity seeks them. A man whose vices and irregularities have brought his liberty and life into danger will always be viewed with an eye of compassion by those who understand what human nature is made of. And, while we acknowledge the severity of the law to be founded upon principles of necessity and justice, and are glad that there is such a barrier provided for the peace of society, if we consider that the difference between ourselves and the culprit is not of our own making, we shall be, as you are, tenderly affected with the view of his misery, and not the less so because he has brought it upon himself. I look upon the worst man in Chelmsford gaol with a more favourable eye than upon ——, who claims a servant's wages from one who never was his master.

I give you joy of your own hair. No doubt you are a considerable gainer in your appearance by

* Private Correspondence.

† This alludes to his attendance on a condemned malefactor in the jail at Chelmsford.

being disperiwigged. The best wig is that which most resembles the natural hair; why then should he that has hair enough of his own have recourse to imitation? I have little doubt but that, if an arm or a leg could have been taken off with as little pain as attends the amputation of a curl or a lock of hair, the natural limb would have been thought less becoming or less convenient by some men than a wooden one, and been disposed of accordingly.

Yours ever,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, Feb. 8, 1781.

My dear Friend—It is possible that Mrs. Hill may not be herself a sufferer by the late terrible catastrophe in the Islands; but I should suppose, by her correspondence with those parts, she may be connected with some that are. In either case, I condole with her; for it is reasonable to imagine that, since the first tour that Columbus made into the Western world, it never before experienced such a convulsion, perhaps never since the foundation of the globe.† You say the state grows old, and discovers many symptoms of decline. A writer possessed of a genius for hypothesis, like that of

* Private Correspondence.

† This season was remarkable for the most destructive hurricanes ever remembered in the West Indies.

Burnet, might construct a plausible argument to prove that the world itself is in a state of superannuation, if there be such a word. If not, there must be such a one as superannuity. When that just equilibrium that has hitherto supported all things seems to fail, when the elements burst the chain that had bound them, the wind sweeping away the works of man, and man himself together with his works, and the ocean seeming to overleap the command, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed," these irregular and prodigious vagaries seemed to bespeak a decay, and forebode, perhaps, not a very distant dissolution. This thought has so run away with my attention, that I have left myself no room for the little politics that have only Great Britain for their object. Who knows but that while a thousand and ten thousand tongues are employed in adjusting the scale of our national concerns, in complaining of new taxes, and funds loaded with a debt of accumulating millions, the consummation of all things may discharge it in a moment, and the scene of all this bustle disappear, as if it had never been; Charles Fox would say, perhaps, he thought it very unlikely. I question if he could prove even that. I am sure, however, he could not prove it to be impossible.

Yours

W C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, Feb. 15, 1781.

My dear Friend—I am glad you were pleased with my report of so extraordinary a case.* If the thought of versifying the decisions of our courts of justice had struck me while I had the honour to attend them, it would perhaps have been no difficult matter to have compiled a volume of such amusing and interesting precedents; which, if they wanted the eloquence of the Greek or Roman oratory, would have amply compensated that deficiency by the harmony of rhyme and metre.

Your account of my uncle and your mother gave me great pleasure. I have long been afraid to inquire after some in whose welfare I always feel myself interested, lest the question should produce a painful answer. Longevity is the lot of so few, and is so seldom rendered comfortable by the associations of good health and good spirits, that I could not very reasonably suppose either your relations or mine so happy in those respects as it seems they are. May they continue to enjoy those blessings so long as the date of life shall last. I do not think that in these costermonger days, as I have a notion Falstaff calls them, an antediluvian age is at all a desirable thing, but to live comfortably while we do live is a great matter, and comprehends in it every thing that can be wished for on this side the curtain that hangs between Time and Eternity!

* He alludes to the humorous verses on the Nose and the Eyes, inserted in a preceding letter.

Farewell, my better friend than any I have t
boast of either among the Lords or gentlemen o
the House of Commons.

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Feb. 18, 1781.

My dear Friend—I send you "Table Talk." I
is a medley of many things, some that may be use
ful, and some that, for aught I know, may be very
diverting. I am merry that I may decoy people
into my company, and grave that they may be the
better for it. Now and then I put on the garb of a
philosopher, and take the opportunity that disguise
procures me to drop a word in favour of religion.
In short, there is some froth, and here and there a
bit of sweetmeat, which seems to entitle it justly
to the name of a certain dish the ladies call a trifle.
I did not choose to be more facetious, lest I should
consult the taste of my readers at the expense of
my own approbation; nor more serious than I have
been, lest I should forfeit theirs. A poet in my
circumstances has a difficult part to act: one mi-
nute obliged to bridle his humour, if he has any,
and the next, to clap a spur to the sides of it: now
ready to weep from a sense of the importance of
his subject, and on a sudden constrained to laugh
lest his gravity should be mistaken for dulness. I
this be not violent exercise for the mind, I know

* Private Correspondence.

not what is; and if any man doubt it, let him try. Whether all this management and contrivance be necessary I do not know, but am inclined to suspect that if my Muse was to go forth clad in Quaker colour, without one bit of riband to enliven her appearance, she might walk from one end of London to the other as little noticed as if she were one of the sisterhood indeed.

You had been married thirty-one years last Monday. When you married I was eighteen years of age, and had just left Westminster school. At that time, I valued a man according to his proficiency and taste in classical literature, and had the meanest opinion of all other accomplishments unaccompanied by that. I lived to see the vanity of what I had made my pride, and in a few years found that there were other attainments which would carry a man more handsomely through life than a mere knowledge of what Homer and Virgil had left behind them. In measure as my attachment to these gentry wore off, I found a more welcome reception among those whose acquaintance it was more my interest to cultivate. But all this time was spent in painting a piece of wood that had no life in it. At last I began to think *indeed;* I found myself in possession of many baubles, but not one grain of solidity in all my treasures. Then I learned the truth, and then I lost it, and there ends my history. I would no more than you wish to live such a life over again, but for one reason. He that is carried to execution, though through the roughest road, when he arrives at the destined spot

would be glad, notwithstanding the many jolts he met with, to repeat his journey.

Yours, my dear Sir, with our joint love,

W. C.

TO MRS. HILL.*

Olney, Feb. 19, 1781.

Dear Madam—When a man, especially a man that lives altogether in the country, undertakes to write to a lady he never saw, he is the awkwardest creature in the world. He begins his letter under the same sensations he would have if he was to accost her in person, only with this difference,—that he may take as much time as he pleases for consideration, and need not write a single word that he has not well weighed and pondered beforehand, much less a sentence that he does not think supereminently clever. In every other respect, whether he be engaged in an interview or in a letter, his behaviour is, for the most part, equally constrained and unnatural. He resolves, as they say, to set the best leg foremost, which often proves to be what Hudibras calls—

> ——————Not that of bone,
> But much its better—th' wooden one.

His extraordinary effort only serves, as in the case of that hero, to throw him on the other side of his horse; and he owes his want of success, if not to absolute stupidity, to his most earnest endeavour to secure it.

* Private Correspondence.

Now I do assure you, madam, that all these sprightly effusions of mine stand entirely clear of the charge of premeditation, and that I never entered upon a business of this kind with more simplicity in my life. I determined, before I began, to lay aside all attempts of the kind I have just mentioned; and, being perfectly free from the fetters that self-conceit, commonly called bashfulness, fastens upon the mind, am, as you see, surprisingly brilliant.

My principal design is to thank you in the plainest terms, which always afford the best proof of a man's sincerity, for your obliging present. The seeds will make a figure hereafter in the stove of a much greater man than myself, who am a little man, with no stove at all. Some of them, however, I shall raise for my own amusement, and keep them as long as they can be kept in a bark heat, which I give them all the year; and, in exchange for those I part with, I shall receive such exotics as are not too delicate for a greenhouse.

I will not omit to tell you, what no doubt you have heard already, though perhaps you have never made the experiment, that leaves gathered at the fall are found to hold their heat much longer than bark, and are preferable in every respect. Next year, I intend to use them myself. I mention it, because Mr. Hill told me some time since, that he was building a stove, in which I suppose they will succeed much better than in a frame.

I beg to thank you again, madam, for the very fine salmon you was so kind as to favour me with,

which has all the sweetness of a Hertfordshire trout, and resembles it so much in flavour, that blindfold I should not have known the difference.

I beg, madam, you will accept all these thanks, and believe them as sincere as they really are. Mr. Hill knows me well enough to be able to vouch for me that I am not over-much addicted to compliments and fine speeches; nor do I mean either the one or the other, when I assure you that I am, dear madam, not merely for his sake, but your own,

Your most obedient
and affectionate servant,
W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, Feb. 25, 1781.

My dear Friend—He that tells a long story should take care that it be not made a long story by his manner of telling it. His expression should be natural, and his method clear; the incidents should be interrupted by very few reflections, and parentheses should be entirely discarded. I do not know that poor Mr. Teedon guides himself in the affair of story-telling by any one of these rules, or by any rule indeed that I ever heard of. He has just left us after a long visit, the greatest part of which he spent in the narration of a certain detail of facts that might have been compressed into a much smaller compass, and my attention to which has wearied and worn out all my spirits. You know how scrupulously nice he is in the choice of

* Private Correspondence.

his expression; an exactness that soon becomes very inconvenient both to speaker and hearer, where there is not a great variety to choose out of. But Saturday evening is come, the time I generally devote to my correspondence with you; and Mrs. Unwin will not allow me to let it pass without writing, though, having done it herself, both she and you might well spare me upon the present occasion.

* * * * *
* * * * *

Notwithstanding my purpose to shake hands with the Muse, and take my leave of her for the present, we have already had a *tête-à-tête* since I sent you the last production. I am as much or rather more pleased with my new plan than with any of the foregoing. I mean to give a short summary of the Jewish story, the miraculous interpositions in behalf of that people, their great privileges, their abuse of them, and their consequent destruction; and then, by way of comparison, such another display of the favours vouchsafed to this country, the similar ingratitude with which they have requited them, and the punishment they have therefore reason to expect, unless reformation interpose to prevent it. "Expostulation" is its present title; but I have not yet found in the writing it that facility and readiness, without which I shall despair to finish it well or indeed to finish it at all.

Believe me, my dear Sir, with love to Mrs. N.

Your ever affectionate,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, March 5, 1781.

My dear Friend—Since writing is become one of my principal amusements, and I have already produced so many verses on subjects that entitle them to a hope that they may possibly be useful, I should be sorry to suppress them entirely, or to publish them to no purpose, for want of that cheap ingredient, the name of the author. If my name therefore will serve them in any degree as a passport into the public notice, they are welcome to it; and Mr. Johnson will, if he pleases, announce me to the world by the style and title of

WILLIAM COWPER, ESQ.
OF THE INNER TEMPLE.

If you are of my mind, I think "Table Talk" will be the best to begin with, as the subjects of it are perhaps more popular; and one would wish, at first setting out, to catch the public by the ear and hold them by it as fast as possible, that they may be willing to hear one on a second and a third occasion.

The passage you object to I inserted merely by way of catch, and think that it is not unlikely to answer the purpose. My design was to say as many serious things as I could, and yet to be as lively as was compatible with such a purpose. Do not imagine that I mean to stickle for it, as a pretty creature of my own that I am loth to part with; but I am apprehensive that, without the sprightliness of that passage to introduce it, the following paragraph

* Private Correspondence.

would not show to advantage.—If the world had been filled with men like yourself, I should never have written it; but, thinking myself in a measure obliged to tickle if I meant to please, I therefore affected a jocularity I did not feel. As to the rest, wherever there is war, there is misery and outrage; notwithstanding which it is not only lawful to wish, but even a duty to pray, for the success of one's country. And as to the neutralities, I really think the Russian virago an impertinent puss for meddling with us, and engaging half a score kittens of her acquaintance to scratch the poor old lion, who, if he has been insolent in his day, has probably acted no otherwise than they themselves would have acted in his circumstances and with his power to embolden them.

I am glad that the myrtles reached you safe, but am persuaded from past experience that no management will keep them long alive in London, especially in the city. Our own English Trots, the natives of the country, are for the most part too delicate to thrive there, much more the nice Italian. To give them, however, the best chance they can have, the lady must keep them well watered, giving them a moderate quantity in summer time every other day, and in winter about twice a week; not spring-water, for that would kill them. At Michaelmas, as much of the mould as can be taken out without disturbing the roots must be evacuated, and its place supplied with fresh, the lighter the better. And once in two years the plants must be drawn out of their pots, with the entire ball of earth

about them, and the matted roots pared off with a sharp knife, when they must be planted again with an addition of rich light earth as before. Thus dealt with, they will grow luxuriantly in a green-house, where they can have plenty of sweet air, which is absolutely necessary to their health. I used to purchase them at Covent-garden almost every year, when I lived in the Temple; but even in that airy situation they were sure to lose their leaf in winter, and seldom recovered it again in spring. I wish them a better fate at Hoxton.

Olney has seen this day what it never saw before, and what will serve it to talk of, I suppose, for years to come. At eleven o'clock this morning, a party of soldiers entered the town, driving before them another party, who, after obstinately defending the bridge for some time, were obliged to quit it and run. They ran in very good order, frequently faced about and fired, but were at last obliged to surrender prisoners of war. There has been much drumming and shouting, much scampering about in the dirt, but not an inch of lace made in the town, at least at the Silver End of it.

It is our joint request that you will not again leave us unwritten to for a fortnight. We are so like yourselves in this particular, that we cannot help ascribing so long a silence to the worst cause. The longer your letters the better, but a short one is better than none.

Mrs. Unwin is pretty well, and adds the greetings of her love to mine.

Yours, my dear friend, W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, March 18, 1781.

My dear Friend—A slight disorder in my eye may possibly prevent my writing you a long letter, and would perhaps have prevented my writing at all, if I had not known that you account a fortnight's silence a week too long.

I am sorry that I gave you the trouble to write twice upon so trivial a subject as the passage in question. I did not understand by your first objections to it that you thought it so exceptionable as you do; but, being better informed, I immediately resolved to expunge it, and subjoin a few lines which you will oblige me by substituting in its place. I am not very fond of weaving a political thread into any of my pieces, and that for two reasons: first, because I do not think myself qualified, in point of intelligence, to form a decided opinion on any such topics; and, secondly, because I think them, though perhaps as popular as any, the most useless of all. The following verses are designed to succeed immediately after

——— fights with justice on his side.

Let laurels, drench'd in pure Parnassian dews,
Reward *his* mem'ry, dear to ev'ry muse, &c.†

I am obliged to you for your advice with respect to the manner of publication, and feel myself in-

* Private Correspondence.

† Vide Poems, where, in the next line, the epithet *unshaken* is substituted for *the noblest*, in the letter.

clined to be determined by it. So far as I have proceeded on the subject of "Expostulation," I have written with tolerable ease to myself, and in my own opinion, (for an opinion I am obliged to have about what I write, whether I will or no,) with more emphasis and energy than in either of the others. But it seems to open upon me with an abundance of matter that forebodes a considerable length: and the time of year is come when, what with walking and gardening, I can find but little leisure for the pen. I mean, however, as soon as I have engrafted a new scion into the "Progress of Error" instead of * * * *, and when I have transcribed "Truth," and sent it to you, to apply myself to the composition last undertaken with as much industry as I can. If, therefore, the three first are put into the press while I am spinning and weaving the last, the whole may perhaps be ready for publication before the proper season will be past. I mean at present that a few select smaller pieces, about seven or eight perhaps, the best I can find in a bookful that I have by me, shall accompany them. All together they will furnish, I should imagine, a volume of tolerable bulk, that need not be indebted to an unreasonable breadth of margin for the importance of its figure.

If a board of inquiry were to be established, at which poets were to undergo an examination respecting the motives that induced them to publish, and I were to be summoned to attend, that I might give an account of mine, I think I could truly say, what perhaps few poets could, that, though I have no objection to lucrative consequences, if any such

should follow, they are not my aim; much less is it my ambition to exhibit myself to the world as a genius. What then, says Mr. President, can possibly be your motive? I answer, with a bow—amusement. There is nothing but this—no occupation within the compass of my small sphere, poetry excepted, that can do much towards diverting that train of melancholy thoughts, which, when I am not thus employed, are for ever pouring themselves in upon me. And if I did not publish what I write, I could not interest myself sufficiently in my own success to make an amusement of it.

In my account of the battle fought at Olney, I laid a snare for your curiosity and succeeded. I supposed it would have an enigmatical appearance, and so it had; but like most other riddles, when it comes to be solved, you will find that it was not worth the trouble of conjecture. There are soldiers quartered at Newport and at Olney. These met, by order of their respective officers, in Emberton Marsh, performed all the manœuvres of a deedy battle, and the result was that this town was taken. Since I wrote, they have again encountered with the same intention; and Mr. R—— kept a room for me and Mrs. Unwin, that we might sit and view them at our ease. We did so, but it did not answer our expectation; for, before the contest could be decided, the powder on both sides being expended, the combatants were obliged to leave it an undecided contest. If it were possible that, when two great armies spend the night in expectation of a battle, a third could silently steal away their am-

munition and arms of every kind, what a comedy would it make of that which always has such a tragical conclusion!

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, April 2, 1781.

My dear Friend—fine weather, and a variety of *extra-foraneous* occupations, (search Johnson's dictionary for that word, and if not found there, insert it—for it saves a deal of circumlocution, and is very lawfully compounded,) make it difficult, (excuse the length of a parenthesis, which I did not foresee the length of when I began it, and which may perhaps a little perplex the sense of what I am writing, though, as I seldom deal in that figure of speech, I I have the less need to make an apology for doing it at present,) make it difficult (I say) for me to find opportunities for writing. My morning is engrossed by the garden; and in the afternoon, till I have drunk tea, I am fit for nothing. At five o'clock we walk, and when the walk is over lassitude recommends rest, and again I become fit for nothing. The current hour, therefore, which (I need not tell you) is comprised in the interval between four and five, is devoted to your service, as the only one in the twenty-four which is not otherwise engaged.

I do not wonder that you have felt a great deal upon the occasion you mention in your last, especially on account of the asperity you have met with

in the behaviour of your friend. Reflect, however, that, as it is natural to you to have very fine feelings, it is equally natural to some other tempers to leave those feelings entirely out of the question, and to speak to you, and to act towards you, just as they do towards the rest of mankind, without the least attention to the irritability of your system. Men of a rough and unsparing address should take great care that they be always in the right, the justness and propriety of their sentiments and censures being the only tolerable apology that can be made for such a conduct, especially in a country where civility of behaviour is inculcated even from the cradle. But, in the instance now under our contemplation, I think you a sufferer under the weight of an animadversion not founded in truth, and which, consequently, you did not deserve. I account him faithful in the pulpit who dissembles nothing that he believes for fear of giving offence. To accommodate a discourse to the judgment and opinion of others, for the sake of pleasing them, though by doing so we are obliged to depart widely from our own, is to be unfaithful to ourselves at least, and cannot be accounted fidelity to Him whom we profess to serve. But there are few men who do not stand in need of the exercise of charity and forbearance; and the gentleman in question has afforded you an ample opportunity in this respect to show how readily, though differing in your views, you can practise all that he could possibly expect from you, if your persuasion corresponded exactly with his own.

With respect to *Monsieur le Curé*, I think you

not quite excusable for suffering such a man to give you any uneasiness at all. The grossness and injustice of his demand ought to be its own antidote. If a robber should miscall you a pitiful fellow for not carrying a purse full of gold about you, would his brutality give you any concern? I suppose not. Why, then, have you been distrest in the present instance?

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, April 8, 1781

My dear Friend—Since I commenced author, my letters are even less worth your acceptance than they were before. I shall soon, however, lay down the character, and cease to trouble you with directions to a printer, at least till the summer is over. If I live to see the return of winter, I may, perhaps, assume it again; but my appetite for fame is not keen enough to combat with my love of fine weather, my love of indolence, and my love of gardening employments.

I send you, by Mr. Old, my works complete, bound in brown paper, and numbered according to the series in which I would have them published. With respect to the poem called "Truth," it is *so* true, that it can hardly fail of giving offence to unenlightened readers. I think, therefore, that, in order to obviate in some measure those prejudices that will naturally

* Private Correspondence.

erect their bristles against it, an explanatory preface, such as you (and nobody so well as you) can furnish me with, will have every grace of propriety to recommend it. Or, if you are not averse to the task, and your avocations will allow you to undertake it, and if you think it would be still more proper, I should be glad to be indebted to you for a preface to the whole. I wish you, however, to consult your own judgment upon the occasion, and to engage in either of these works, or neither, just as your discretion guides you.

I have written a great deal to-day, which must be my excuse for an abrupt conclusion. Our love attends you both. We are in pretty good health; Mrs. Unwin, indeed, better than usual: and as to me, I ail nothing but the incurable ailment.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

Thanks for the cocoa-nut.

I send you a cucumber, not of my own raising, and yet raised by me.

Solve this enigma, dark enough
To puzzle any brains
That are not downright puzzle-proof,
And eat it for your pains.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Monday, April 23, 1781.

My dear Friend—Having not the least doubt of your ability to execute just such a preface as I

* Private Correspondence.

should wish to see prefixed to my publication, and being convinced that you have no good foundation for those which you yourself entertain upon the subject, I neither withdraw my requisition nor abate one jot of the earnestness with which I made it. I admit the delicacy of the occasion, but am far from apprehending that you will therefore find it difficult to succeed. You can draw a hair-stroke where another man would make a blot as broad as a sixpence.

I am much obliged to you for the interest you take in the appearance of my poems, and much pleased by the alacrity with which you do it. Your favourable opinion of them affords me a comfortable presage with respect to that of the public; for though I make allowances for your partiality to me and mine, because mine, yet I am sure you would not suffer me unadmonished to add myself to the multitude of insipid rhymers, with whose productions the world is already too much pestered.

It is worth while to send *you* a riddle, you make such a variety of guesses, and turn and tumble it about with such an industrious curiosity. The solution of that in question is—let me see; it requires some consideration to explain it, even though I made it. I raised the seed that produced the plant that produced the fruit that produced the seed that produced the fruit I sent you. This latter seed I gave to the gardener of Tyringham, who brought me the cucumber you mention. Thus you see I raised it—that is to say, I raised it virtually by having raised its progenitor; and yet I did not raise

it. because the identical seed from which it grew was raised at a distance. You observe I did not speak rashly when I spoke of it as dark enough to pose an Œdipus, and have no need to call your own sagacity in question for falling short of the discovery.

A report has prevailed at Olney that you are coming in a fortnight; but, taking it for granted that you know best when you shall come, and that you will make us happy in the same knowledge as soon as you are possessed of it yourself, I did not venture to build any sanguine expectations upon it.

I have at last read the second volume of Mr. ——'s work, and had some hope that I should prevail with myself to read the first likewise. I began his book at the latter end, because the first part of it was engaged when I received the second; but I had not so good an appetite as a soldier of the Guards, who, I was informed when I lived in London, would, for a small matter, eat up a cat alive, beginning at her tail and finishing with her whiskers.

Yours, *ut semper*,

W. C

The period was now arrived, in which Cowper was at length to make his appearance in the avowed character of an author. It is an epoch in British literature worthy of being recorded, because poetry in his hands became the handmaid of morality and religion. Too often has the Muse been prostituted to more ignoble ends. But it is to the praise of

Cowper, that he never wrote a line at which modesty might blush. His verse is identified with whatever is pure in conception, chaste in imagery, and moral in its aim. His object was to strengthen, not to enervate; to impart health, not to administer to disease; and to inspire a love for virtue, by exhibiting the deformity of vice. So long as nature shall possess the power to charm, and the interests of solid truth and wisdom, arrayed in the garb of taste, and enforced by nervous language, shall deserve to predominate over seductive imagery, the page of Cowper will demand our admiration, and be read with delight and profit.

The following letters afford a very pleasing circumstantial account of the manner in which he was induced to venture into the world as a poet.

We will only add to the information they contain what we learn from the authority of his guardian friend, Mrs. Unwin, that she strongly solicited him, on his recovery from a very long fit of mental dejection, to devote his thoughts to poetry of considerable extent. She suggested to him, at the same time, the first subject of his verse, "The Progress of Error," which the reader will recollect as the second poem in his first volume. The time when that volume was completed, and the motives of its author for giving it to the world, are clearly displayed in an admirable letter to his poetical cousin, Mrs. Cowper. His feelings, on the approach of publication, are described with his usual nobleness of sentiment and simplicity of expression, in reply to

a question upon the subject from the anxious young friend to whom he gave the first notice of his intention in the next letter.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN

Olney, May 1, 1781

Your mother says I *must* write, and *must* admits of no apology; I might otherwise plead, that I have nothing to say, that I am weary, that I am dull, that it would be more convenient therefore for you, as well as for myself, that I should let it alone. But all these pleas, and whatever pleas besides, either disinclination, indolence, or necessity might suggest are overruled, as they ought to be, the moment a lady adduces her irrefragable argument, *you must.* You have still however one comfort left, that what I must write, you may or may not read, just as it shall please you; unless Lady Anne at your elbow should say you must read it, and then, like a true knight, you will obey without looking for a remedy.

In the press, and speedily will be published, in one volume octavo, price three shillings, Poems, by William Cowper, of the Inner Temple, Esq. You may suppose, by the size of the publication, that the greatest part of them have been long kept secret, because you yourself have never seen them; but the truth is, that they were most of them, except what you have in your possession, the produce of the last winter. Two thirds of the compilation

will be occupied by four pieces, the first of which sprung up in the month of December, and the last of them in the month of March. They contain, I suppose, in all, about two thousand and five hundred lines; are known, or to be known in due time, by the names of *Table Talk—The Progress of Error—Truth—Expostulation.* Mr. Newton writes a preface, and Johnson is the publisher. The principal, I may say the only, reason why I never mentioned to you, till now, an affair which I am just going to make known to all the world (if *that* Mr. All-the-world should think it worth his knowing) has been this; that till within these few days, I had not the honour to know it myself. This may seem strange, but it is true, for, not knowing where to find underwriters who would choose to insure them, and not finding it convenient to a purse like mine to run any hazard, even upon the credit of my own ingenuity, I was very much in doubt for some weeks whether any bookseller would be willing to subject himself to an ambiguity, that might prove very expensive in case of a bad market. But Johnson has heroically set all peradventures at defiance, and takes the whole charge upon himself. So out I come. I shall be glad of my Translations from Vincent Bourne in your next frank. My Muse will lay herself at your feet immediately on her first public appearance.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, May 9, 1781.

My dear Sir—I am in the press, and it is in vain to deny it. But how mysterious is the conveyance of intelligence from one end to the other of your great city! Not many days since, except one man, and he but little taller than yourself, all London was ignorant of it; for I do not suppose that the public prints have yet announced the most agreeable tidings; the title-page, which is the basis of the advertisement, having so lately reached the publisher; and it is now known to you, who live at least two miles distant from my confidant upon the occasion.

My labours are principally the production of the last winter; all indeed, except a few of the minor pieces. When I can find no other occupation I think, and when I think I am very apt to do it in rhyme. Hence it comes to pass, that the season of the year which generally pinches off the flowers of poetry unfolds mine, such as they are, and crowns me with a winter garland. In this respect, therefore, I and my contemporary bards are by no means upon a par. They write when the delightful influences of fine weather, fine prospects, and a brisk motion of the animal spirits, make poetry almost the language of nature; and I, when icicles depend from all the leaves of the Parnassian laurel, and when a reasonable man would as little expect to succeed in verse as to hear a blackbird whistle.

This must be my apology to you for whatever want of fire and animation you observe in what you will shortly have the perusal of. As to the public, if they like me not, there is no remedy. A friend will weigh and consider all disadvantages, and make as large allowances as an author can wish, and larger perhaps than he has any right to expect; but not so the world at large; whatever they do not like, they will not by any apology be persuaded to forgive, and it would be in vain to tell *them* that I wrote my verses in January, for they would immediately reply, "Why did not you write them in May?" A question that might puzzle a wiser head than we poets are generally blessed with.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, May 10, 1781.

My dear Friend—It is Friday; I have just drunk tea, and just perused your letter; and though this answer to it cannot set off till Sunday, I obey the warm impulse I feel, which will not permit me to postpone the business till the regular time of writing.

I expected you would be grieved; if you had not been so, those sensibilities which attend you upon every other occasion must have left you upon this. I am sorry that I have given you pain, but not sorry that you have felt it. A concern of that sort would be absurd, because it would be to regret

your friendship for me, and to be dissatisfied with the effect of it. Allow yourself however three minutes only for reflection, and your penetration must necessarily dive into the motives of my conduct. In the first place, and by way of preface, remember that I do not (whatever your partiality may incline you to do) account it of much consequence to any friend of mine whether he is, or is not, employed by me upon such an occasion. But all affected renunciations of poetical merit apart, and all unaffected expressions of the sense I have of my own littleness in the poetical character too, the obvious and only reason why I resorted to Mr. Newton, and not to my friend Unwin, was this: that the former lived at London, the latter at Stock; the former was upon the spot to correct the press, to give instructions respecting any sudden alterations, and to settle with the publisher every thing that might possibly occur in the course of such a business; the latter could not be applied to for these purposes without what I thought would be a manifest encroachment on his kindness; because it might happen that the troublesome office might cost him now and then a journey, which it was absolutely impossible for me to endure the thought of.

When I wrote to you for the copies you have sent me, I told you I was making a collection, but not with a design to publish There is nothing truer than at that time I had not the smallest expectation of sending a volume of Poems to the press. I had several small pieces that might amuse, but I would not, when I publish, make the amusement of

the reader my only object. When the winter deprived me of other employments, I began to compose, and, seeing six or seven months before me, which would naturally afford me much leisure for such a purpose, I undertook a piece of some length; that finished, another; and so on, till I had amassed the number of lines I mentioned in my last.

Believe of me what you please, but not that I am indifferent to you or your friendship for me, on any occasion.

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, May 23, 1781.

My dear Friend—If a writer's friends have need of patience, how much more the writer! Your desire to see my Muse in public, and mine to gratify you, must both suffer the mortification of delay—I expected that my trumpeter would have informed the world, by this time, of all that is needful for them to know upon such an occasion; and that an advertising blast, blown through every newspaper, would have said—"The poet is coming."—But man, especially man that writes verse, is born to disappointments, as surely as printers and booksellers are born to be the most dilatory and tedious of all creatures. The plain English of this magnificent preamble is, that the season of publication is just elapsed, that the town is going into the country

every day, and that my book cannot appear till they return, that is to say, not till next winter. This misfortune, however, comes not without its attendant advantage; I shall now have, what I should not otherwise have had, an opportunity to correct the press myself: no small advantage upon any occasion, but especially important where poetry is concerned! A single erratum may knock out the brains of a whole passage, and that, perhaps, which of all others the unfortunate poet is the most proud of. Add to this that, now and then, there is to be found in a printing-house a presumptuous intermeddler, who will fancy himself a poet too, and, what is still worse, a better than he that employs him. The consequence is that, with cobbling, and tinkering, and patching on here and there a shred of his own, he makes such a difference between the original and the copy, that an author cannot know his own work again. Now, as I choose to be responsible for nobody's dulness but my own, I am a little comforted when I reflect that it will be in my power to prevent all such impertinence, and yet not without your assistance. It will be quite necessary that the correspondence between me and Johnson should be carried on without the expense of postage, because proof-sheets would make double or treble letters, which expense, as in every instance it must occur twice, first when the packet is sent and again when it is returned, would be rather inconvenient to me, who, as you perceive, am forced to live by my wits, and to him who hopes to get a little matter, no doubt, by the

same means. Half a dozen franks, therefore, to me, and *totidem* to him, will be singularly acceptable, if you can, without feeling it in any respect a trouble, procure them for me.*

I am much obliged to you for your offer to support me in a translation of Bourne. It is but seldom, however, and never except for my amusement, that I translate; because I find it disagreeable to work by another man's pattern; I should, at least, be sure to find it so in a business of any length. Again, *that* is epigrammatic and witty in Latin which would be perfectly insipid in English, and a translator of Bourne would frequently find himself obliged to supply what is called the turn, which is in fact the most difficult and the most expensive part of the whole composition, and could not, perhaps, in many instances, be done with any tolerable success. If a Latin poem is neat, elegant, and musical, it is enough—but English readers are not so easily satisfied. To quote myself, you will find, in comparing the Jackdaw with the original, that I was obliged to sharpen a point, which, though smart enough in the Latin, would in English have appeared as plain and as blunt as the tag of a lace. I love the memory of Vinny Bourne. I think him a better Latin poet than Tibullus, Propertius, Auso-

* The privilege of franking letters was formerly exercised in a very different manner from what is now in use. The name of the M.P. was inserted, as is usual, on the cover of the letter, but the address was left to be added when and where the writer of the letter found it most expedient.

nius, or any of the writers in *his* way, except Ovid, and not at all inferior to *him*. I love him too, with a love of partiality, because he was usher of the fifth form at Westminster, when I passed through it. He was so good-natured, and so indolent, that I lost more than I got by him; for he made me as idle as himself. He was such a sloven, as if he had trusted to his genius as a cloak for every thing that could disgust you in his person; and indeed in his writings he has almost made amends for all. His humour is entirely original—he can speak of a magpie or a cat in terms so exquisitely appropriated to the character he draws, that one would suppose him animated by the spirit of the creature he describes. And with all his drollery there is a mixture of rational and even religious reflection, at times, and always an air of pleasantry, good-nature, and humanity, that makes him, in my mind, one of the most amiable writers in the world. It is not common to meet with an author, who can make you smile and yet at nobody's expense; who is always entertaining and yet always harmless; and who, though always elegant, and classical to a degree not always found in the classics themselves, charms more by the simplicity and playfulness of his ideas than by the neatness and purity of his verse; yet such was poor Vinny. I remember seeing the Duke of Richmond set fire to his greasy locks, and box his ears to put it out again.

Since I began to write long poems I seem to turn up my nose at the idea of a short one. I have lately entered upon one, which, if ever finished, cannot easily

be comprised in much less than a thousand lines! But this must make part of a second publication, and be accompanied, in due time, by others not yet thought of; for it seems (what I did not know till the bookseller had occasion to tell me so) that single pieces stand no chance, and that nothing less than a volume will go down. You yourself afford me a proof of the certainty of this intelligence, by sending me franks which nothing less than a volume can fill. I have accordingly sent you one, but am obliged to add that, had the wind been in any other point of the compass, or, blowing as it does from the east, had it been less boisterous, you must have been contented with a much shorter letter, but the abridgment of every other occupation is very favourable to that of writing.

I am glad I did not expect to hear from you by this post, for the boy has lost the bag in which your letter must have been enclosed—another reason for my prolixity!

Yours affectionately,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, May 28, 1781.

My dear Friend—I am much obliged to you for the pains you have taken with my "Table Talk," and wish that my *vivâ voce* table-talk could repay

* Private Correspondence.

you for the trouble you have had with the written one.

The season is wonderfully improved within this day or two; and, if these cloudless skies are continued to us, or rather if the cold winds do not set in again, promises you a pleasant excursion, as far, at least, as the weather can conduce to make it such. You seldom complain of too much sunshine, and if you are prepared for a heat somewhat like that of Africa, the south walk in our long garden will exactly suit you. Reflected from the gravel and from the walls, and beating upon your head at the same time, it may possibly make you wish you could enjoy for an hour or two that immensity of shade afforded by the gigantic trees still growing in the land of your captivity.* If you could spend a day now and then in those forests, and return with a wish to England, it would be no small addition to the number of your best pleasures. But *pennæ non homini datæ*. The time will come, perhaps, (but death will come first,) when you will be able to visit them without either danger, trouble, or expense: and when the contemplation of those well-remembered scenes will awaken in you emotions of gratitude and praise, surpassing all you could possibly sustain at present. In this sense, I suppose, there is a heaven upon earth at all times, and that the disembodied spirit may find a peculiar joy, arising

* Mr. Newton's voyage to Africa, and his state of mind at that period, are teemingly described by himself in his own writings, as well as the great moral change which he subsequently experienced.

from the contemplation of those places it was formerly conversant with, and so far, at least, be reconciled to a world it was once so weary of, as to use it in the delightful way of thankful recollection.

Miss Catlett must not think of any other lodging than we can, without any inconvenience, as we shall with all possible pleasure, furnish her with. We can each of us say—that is, I can say it in Latin, and Mrs. Unwin in English—*Nihil tui à me alienum puto.*

Having two more letters to write, I find myself obliged to shorten this; so, once more wishing you a good journey, and ourselves the happiness of receiving you in good health and spirits,

I remain affectionately yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, May 28, 1781.

My dear Friend—I believe I never gave you trouble without feeling more than I give. So much by way of preface and apology!

Thus stands the case—Johnson has begun to print, and Mr. Newton has already corrected the first sheet. This unexpected dispatch makes it necessary for me to furnish myself with the means of communication, viz. the franks, as soon as may be. There are reasons (I believe I mentioned in my last) why I choose to revise the proof myself: nevertheless, if your delicacy must suffer the puncture of a pin's point in procuring the franks for me,

I release you entirely from the task: you are as free as if I had never mentioned them. But you will oblige me by a speedy answer upon this subject, because it is expedient that the printer should know to whom he is to send his copy; and, when the press is once set, those humble servants of the poets are rather impatient of any delay, because the types are wanted for other authors, who are equally impatient to be born.

This fine weather, I suppose, sets you on horseback, and allures the ladies into the garden. If I was at Stock, I should be of their party, and, while they sat knotting or netting in the shade, should comfort myself with the thought that I had not a beast under me whose walk would seem tedious, whose trot would jumble me, and whose gallop might throw me into a ditch. What nature expressly designed me for I have never been able to conjecture, I seem to myself so universally disqualified for the common and customary occupations and amusements of mankind. When I was a boy, I excelled at cricket and football, but the fame I acquired by achievements that way is long since forgotten, and I do not know that I have made a figure in any thing since. I am sure, however, that she did not design me for a horseman, and that, if all men were of my mind, there would be an end of all jockeyship for ever. I am rather straitened for time, and not very rich in materials; therefore, with our joint love to you all, conclude myself,

Yours ever,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, June 5, 1781.

My dear Friend—If the old adage be true, that "he gives twice who gives speedily," it is equally true that he who not only uses expedition in giving, but gives more than was asked, gives thrice at least. Such is the style in which Mr. —— confers a favour. He has not only sent me franks to Johnson, but, under another cover, has added six to you. These last, for aught that appears by your letter, he threw in of his own mere bounty. I beg that my share of thanks may not be wanting on this occasion, and that, when you write to him next, you will assure him of the sense I have of the obligation, which is the more flattering, as it includes a proof of his predilection in favour of the poems his franks are destined to enclose. May they not forfeit his good opinion hereafter, nor yours, to whom I hold myself indebted in the first place, and who have equally given me credit for their deservings! Your mother says that, although there are passages in them containing opinions which will not be universally subscribed to, the world will at least allow what my great modesty will not permit me to subjoin. I have the highest opinion of her judgment, and know, by having experienced the soundness of them, that her observations are always worthy of attention and regard. Yet, strange as it may seem, I do not feel the vanity of an author, when she commends me; but I feel something bet-

ter, a spur to my diligence, and a cordial to my spirits, both together animating me to deserve, at least not to fall short of, her expectations. For I verily believe, if my dulness should earn me the character of a dunce, the censure would affect her more than me; not that I am insensible of the value of a good name, either as a man or an author. Without an ambition to attain it, it is absolutely unattainable under either of those descriptions. But my life having been in many respects a series of mortifications and disappointments, I am become less apprehensive and impressible, perhaps, in some points, than I should otherwise have been; and, though I should be exquisitely sorry to disgrace my friends, could endure my own share of the affliction with a reasonable measure of tranquillity.

These seasonable showers have poured floods upon all the neighbouring parishes, but have passed us by. My garden languishes, and, what is worse, the fields too languish, and the upland-grass is burnt. These discriminations are not fortuitous. But if they are providential, what do they import? I can only answer, as a friend of mine once answered a mathematical question in the schools—"*Prorsùs nescio.*" Perhaps it is that men who will not believe what they cannot understand may learn the folly of their conduct, while their very senses are made to witness against them; and themselves, in the course of Providence, become the subjects of a thousand dispensations they cannot explain. But the end is never answered. The lesson is inculcated indeed frequently enough, but nobody learns

it. Well. Instruction, vouchsafed in vain, is (I suppose) a debt to be accounted for hereafter. You must understand this to be a soliloquy. I wrote my thoughts without recollecting that I was writing a letter, and to you.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, June 24, 1781.

My dear Friend—The letter you withheld so long, lest it should give me pain, gave me pleasure. Horace says, the poets are a waspish race; and, from my own experience of the temper of two or three with whom I was formerly connected, I can readily subscribe to the character he gives them. But, for my own part, I have never yet felt that excessive irritability, which some writers discover, when a friend, in the words of Pope,

"Just hints a fault, or hesitates dislike."

Least of all would I give way to such an unseasonable ebullition, merely because a civil question is proposed to me, with such gentleness, and by a man whose concern for my credit and character I verily believe to be sincere. I reply therefore, not peevishly, but with a sense of the kindness of your intentions, that I hope you may make yourself very easy on a subject, that I can perceive has occasioned you some solicitude. When I wrote the poem called "Truth," it was indispensably necessary that I should set forth that doctrine which I know

to be true, and that I should pass what I understood to be a just censure upon opinions and persuasions that differ from or stand in direct opposition to it; because, though some errors may be innocent, and even religious errors are not always pernicious, yet, in a case where the faith and hope of a Christian are concerned, they must necessarily be destructive; and because neglecting this, I should have betrayed my subject; either suppressing what in my judgment is of the last importance, or giving countenance by a timid silence to the very evils it was my design to combat. That you may understand me better, I will subjoin——that I wrote that poem on purpose to inculcate the eleemosynary character of the Gospel, as a dispensation of mercy in the most absolute sense of the word, to the exclusion of all claims of merit on the part of the receiver; consequently to set the brand of invalidity upon the plea of works, and to discover, upon scriptural ground, the absurdity of that notion, which includes a solecism in the very terms of it, that man by repentance and good works may deserve the mercy of his Maker: I call it a solecism, because mercy deserved ceases to be mercy, and must take the name of justice. This is the opinion which I said in my last the world would not acquiesce in, but except this I do not recollect that I have introduced a syllable into any of my pieces that they can possibly object to; and even this I have endeavoured to deliver from doctrinal dryness, by as many pretty things in the way of trinket and plaything as I could muster upon the subject. So that,

if I have rubbed their gums, I have taken care to do it with a coral, and even that coral embellished by the ribbon to which it is tied, and recommended by the tinkling of all the bells I could contrive to annex to it.

You need not trouble yourself to call on Johnson; being perfectly acquainted with the progress of the business, I am able to satisfy your curiosity myself—the post before the last, I returned to him the second sheet of "Table Talk," which he had sent me for correction, and which stands foremost in the volume. The delay has enabled me to add a piece of considerable length, which, but for the delay, would not have made its appearance upon this occasion: it answers to the name of Hope.

I remember a line in the Odyssey, which, literally translated, imports that there is nothing in the world more impudent than the belly. But, had Homer met with an instance of modesty like yours, he would either have suppressed that observation, or at least have qualified it with an exception. I hope that, for the future, Mrs. Unwin will never suffer you to go to London without putting some victuals in your pocket; for what a strange article would it make in a newspaper, that a tall, well-dressed gentleman, by his appearance a clergyman, and with a purse of gold in his pocket, was found starved to death in the street. How would it puzzle conjecture to account for such a phenomenon! some would suppose that you had been kidnapped, like Betty Canning, of hungry memory; others would say the gentleman was a Methodist,

and had practised a rigorous self-denial, which had unhappily proved too hard for his constitution; but I will venture to say that nobody would divine the real cause, or suspect for a moment that your modesty had occasioned the tragedy in question. By the way, is it not possible that the spareness and slenderness of your person may be owing to the same cause? for surely it is reasonable to suspect that the bashfulness which could prevail against you on so trying an occasion may be equally prevalent on others. I remember having been told by Colman, that, when he once dined with Garrick, he repeatedly pressed him to eat more of a certain dish that he was known to be particularly fond of; Colman as often refused, and at last declared he could not. "But could not you," says Garrick, "if you was in a dark closet by yourself?" The same question might perhaps be put to you, with as much or more propriety, and therefore I recommend it to you, either to furnish yourself with a little more assurance or always to eat in the dark.

We sympathize with Mrs. Unwin, and, if it will be any comfort to her to know it, can assure her, that a lady in our neighbourhood is always, on such occasions, the most miserable of all things, and yet escapes with great facility through all the dangers of her state.

Yours, *ut semper*,

W. C.

Among the occurrences that deserve to be recorded in the life of Cowper, the commencement of his acquaintance with Lady Austen, from its connexion with his literary history, is entitled to distinct notice. This lady possessed a highly cultivated mind, and the power, in no ordinary degree, to engage and interest the attention. This acquaintance soon ripened into friendship, and it is to her that we are primarily indebted for the poem of "The Task," for the ballad of "John Gilpin," and for the translation of Homer. The occasion of this acquaintance was as follows.

A lady, whose name was Jones, was one of the few neighbours admitted in the residence of the retired poet. She was the wife of a clergyman, who resided at the village of Clifton, within a mile of Olney. Her sister, the widow of Sir Robert Austen, Baronet, came to pass some time with her in the summer of 1781; and, as the two ladies entered a shop in Olney, opposite to the house of Mrs. Unwin, Cowper observed them from his window.—Although naturally shy, and now rendered more so by his very long illness, he was so struck with the appearance of the stranger, that, on hearing she was sister to Mrs. Jones, he requested Mrs. Unwin to invite them to tea. So strong was his reluctance to admit the company of strangers, that, after he had occasioned this invitation, he was for a long time unwilling to join the little party; but, having forced himself at last to engage in conversation with Lady Austen, he was so delighted with her colloquial talents, that he attended the ladies on their

return to Clifton; and from that time continued to cultivate the regard of his new acquaintance with such assiduous attention, that she soon received from him the familiar and endearing title of Sister Ann.

The great and happy influence which an incident that seems at first sight so trivial produced on the imagination of Cowper, will best appear from the following epistle, which, soon after Lady Austen's return to London for the winter, the poet addressed to her, on the seventeenth of December, 1781.

Dear Anna—between friend and friend,
Prose answers every common end;
Serves, in a plain and homely way,
T' express th' occurrence of the day;
Our health, the weather, and the news;
What walks we take, what books we choose;
And all the floating thoughts we find
Upon the surface of the mind.

But when a poet takes the pen,
Far more alive than other men,
He feels a gentle tingling come
Down to his finger and his thumb,
Deriv'd from nature's noblest part,
The centre of a glowing heart!
And this is what the world, who knows
No flights above the pitch of prose,
His more sublime vagaries slighting,
Denominates an itch for writing.
No wonder I, who scribble rhyme,
To catch the triflers of the time,
And tell them truths divine and clear,
Which, couch'd in prose, they will not hear;

Who labour hard to allure, and draw,
The loiterers I never saw,
Should feel that itching and that tingling,
With all my purpose intermingling,
To your intrinsic merit true,
When call'd to address myself to you.

Mysterious are his ways, whose power
Brings forth that unexpected hour,
When minds, that never met before,
Shall meet, unite, and part no more:
It is th' allotment of the skies,
The hand of the Supremely Wise,
That guides and governs our affections,
And plans and orders our connexions;
Directs us in our distant road,
And marks the bounds of our abode.
Thus we were settled when you found us,
Peasants and children all around us,
Not dreaming of so dear a friend,
Deep in the abyss of Silver-End.*
Thus Martha, ev'n against her will,
Perch'd on the top of yonder hill;
And you, though you must needs prefer
The fairer scenes of sweet Sancerre,†
Are come from distant Loire, to choose
A cottage on the banks of Ouse.
This page of Providence quite new,
And now just opening to our view,
Employs our present thoughts and pains
To guess and spell what it contains:
But day by day, and year by year,
Will make the dark ænigma clear;

* An obscure part of Olney, adjoining to the residence of Cowper, which faced the market-place.

† Lady Austen's residence in France.

And furnish us perhaps at last,
Like other scenes already past,
With proof that we and our affairs,
Are part of a Jehovah's cares:
For God unfolds, by slow degrees,
The purport of his deep decrees;
Sheds every hour a clearer light,
In aid of our defective sight;
And spreads at length before the soul,
A beautiful and perfect whole,
Which busy man's inventive brain
Toils to anticipate in vain.

Say, Anna, had you never known
The beauties of a rose full blown,
Could you, tho' luminous your eye,
By looking on the bud descry,
Or guess with a prophetic power,
The future splendour of the flower?
Just so, th' Omnipotent, who turns
The system of a world's concerns,
From mere minutiæ can educe
Events of most important use;
And bid a dawning sky display
The blaze of a meridian day.
The works of man tend, one and all,
As needs they must, from great to small;
And vanity absorbs at length
The monuments of human strength.
But who can tell how vast the plan
Which this day's incident began?
Too small perhaps the slight occasion
For our dim-sighted observation;
It pass'd unnotic'd, as the bird
That cleaves the yielding air unheard,
And yet may prove, when understood,
An harbinger of endless good.

Not that I deem or mean to call
Friendship a blessing cheap or small;
But merely to remark that ours,
Like some of nature's sweetest flowers,
Rose from a seed of tiny size,
That seemed to promise no such prize:
A transient visit intervening,
And made almost without a meaning,
(Hardly the effect of inclination,
Much less of pleasing expectation!)
Produced a friendship, then begun,
That has cemented us in one;
And plac'd it in our power to prove,
By long fidelity and love,
That Solomon has wisely spoken;
"A three-fold cord is not soon broken."

In this interesting poem the author seems prophetically to anticipate the literary efforts that were to spring, in process of time, from a friendship so unexpected and so pleasing.

Genius of the most exquisite kind is sometimes, and perhaps generally, so modest and diffident as to require continual solicitation and encouragement from the voice of sympathy and friendship to lead it into permanent and successful exertion. Such was the genius of Cowper; and he therefore considered the cheerful and animating society of his new and accomplished friend as a blessing conferred on him by the signal favour of Providence.

We shall find frequent allusions to this lady in the progress of the following correspondence.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, July 7, 1781.

My dear Friend—Mr. Old brought us the acceptable news of your safe arrival. My sensations at your departure were far from pleasant, and Mrs. Unwin suffered more upon the occasion than when you first took leave of Olney. When we shall meet again, and in what circumstances, or whether we shall meet or not, is an article to be found no where but in that volume of Providence which belongs to the current year, and will not be understood till it is accomplished. This I know, that your visit was most agreeable here. It was so even to me, who, though I live in the midst of many agreeables, am but little sensible of their charms. But, when you came, I determined, as much as possible, to be deaf to the suggestions of despair; that, if I could contribute but little to the pleasure of the opportunity, I might not dash it with unseasonable melancholy, and, like an instrument with a broken string, interrupt the harmony of the concert.

Lady Austen, waving all forms, has paid us the first visit; and, not content with showing us that proof of her respect, made handsome apologies for her intrusion. We returned the visit yesterday. She is a lively, agreeable woman; has seen much of the world, and accounts it a great simpleton, as it is. She laughs and makes laugh, and keeps up a conversation without seeming to labour at it.

* Private Correspondence.

I had rather submit to chastisement now than be obliged to undergo it hereafter. If Johnson, therefore, will mark with a marginal Q, those lines that he or his object to as not sufficiently finished, I will willingly retouch them, or give a reason for my refusal. I shall moreover think myself obliged by any hints of that sort, as I do already to somebody, who, by running here and there two or three paragraphs into one, has very much improved the arrangement of my matter. I am apt, I know, to fritter it into too many pieces, and, by doing so, to disturb that order to which all writings must owe their perspicuity, at least in a considerable measure. With all that carefulness of revisal I have exercised upon the sheets as they have been transmitted to me, I have been guilty of an oversight, and have suffered a great fault to escape me, which I shall be glad to correct, if not too late.

In the "Progress of Error, a part of the Young Squire's apparatus, before he yet enters upon his travels, is said to be

> —— Memorandum-book to minute down
> The several posts, and where the chaise broke down.

Here, the reviewers would say, is not only "down," but "down derry down" into the bargain, the word being made to rhyme to itself. This never occurred to me till last night, just as I was stepping into bed. I should be glad, however, to alter it thus—

> With memorandum-book for every town,
> And ev'ry inn, and where the chaise broke down.

I have advanced so far in "Charity," that I have ventured to give Johnson notice of it, and his option

whether he will print it now or hereafter. I rather wish he may choose the present time, because it will be a proper sequel to "Hope," and because I am willing to think it will embellish the collection.

Whoever means to take my phiz will find himself sorely perplexed in seeking for a fit occasion. That I shall not give him one, is certain; and, if he steals one, he must be as cunning and quicksighted a thief as Autolycus himself. His best course will be to draw a face, and call it mine, at a venture. They who have not seen me these twenty years will say, It may possibly be a striking likeness now, though it bears no resemblance to what he was: time makes great alterations. They who know me better will say, perhaps, Though it is not perfectly the thing, yet there is somewhat of the cast of his countenance. If the nose was a little longer, and the chin a little shorter, the eyes a little smaller, and the forehead a little more protuberant, it would be just the man. And thus, without seeing me at all, the artist may represent me to the public eye, with as much exactness as yours has bestowed upon you, though, I suppose, the original was full in his view when he made the attempt.

We are both as well as when you left us. Our hearty affections wait upon yourself and Mrs. Newton, not forgetting Euphrosyne, the laughing lady.

Yours, my dear Sir,

W. C.

The playfulness of Cowper's humour is amusingly exerted in the following letter:—

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

Olney, July 12, 1781.

My very dear Friend—I am going to send, what when you have read, you may scratch your head, and say, I suppose, there's nobody knows whether what I have got be verse or not;—by the tune and the time, it ought to be rhyme, but if it be, did you ever see, of late or of yore, such a ditty before?

I have writ Charity, not for popularity, but as well as I could, in hopes to do good; and if the Reviewer, should say, "to be sure, the gentleman's Muse wears Methodist shoes, you may know by her pace and talk about grace, that she and her bard have little regard for the taste and fashions, and ruling passions, and hoydening play, of the modern day; and, though she assume a borrowed plume, and now and then wear a tittering air, 'tis only her plan to catch, if she can, the giddy and gay, as they go that way, by a production on a new construction: she has baited her trap, in hopes to snap all that may come with a sugar-plum."—His opinion in this will not be amiss; 'tis what I intend, my principal end, and, if I succeed, and folks should read, till a few are brought to a serious thought, I shall think I am paid for all I have said and all I have done, though I have run, many a time, after a rhyme, as far as from hence to the end of my sense, and by hook or crook, write another book, if I live and am here, another year.

I have heard before, of a room with a floor laid upon springs, and such like things, with so much art, in every part, that when you went in you was forced to begin a minuet pace, with an air and a grace, swimming about, now in and now out, with a deal of state, in a figure of eight, without pipe, or string, or any such thing; and now I have writ, in a rhyming fit, what will make you dance, and, as you advance, will keep you still, though against your will, dancing away, alert and gay, till you come to an end of what I have penn'd, which that you may do, ere Madam and you are quite worn out with jigging about, I take my leave, and here you receive a bow profound, down to the ground, from your humble me——

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, July 22, 1781.

My dear Friend—I am sensible of your difficulties in finding opportunities to write; and therefore, though always desirous and sometimes impatient to hear from you, am never peevish when I am disappointed.

Johnson, having begun to print, has given me some sort of security for his perseverance; else, the tardiness of his operations would almost tempt me to despair of the end. He has, indeed, time enough before him; but that very circumstance is sometimes a snare, and gives occasion to delays that

* Private Correspondence.

cannot be remedied. Witness the hare in the fable, who fell asleep in the midst of the race, and waked not till the tortoise had won the prize.

Taking it for granted that the new marriage-bill would pass, I took occasion, in the Address to Liberty, to celebrate the joyful æra; but in doing so afforded another proof that poets are not always prophets, for the House of Lords have thrown it out. I am, however, provided with four lines to fill up the gap, which I suppose it will be time enough to insert when the copy is sent down. I am in the middle of an affair called "Conversation," which, as "Table Talk" serves in the present volume by way of introductory fiddle to the band that follows, I design shall perform the same office in a second.

Sic brevi fortes jaculamur ævo.

You cannot always find time to write, and I cannot always write a great deal; not for want of time, but for want of something equally requisite; perhaps materials, perhaps spirits, or perhaps more frequently for want of ability to overcome an indolence that I have sometimes heard even you complain of.

Yours, my dear Sir, and Mrs. Newton's,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, July 29, 1781.

My dear Friend—Having given the case you laid before me in your last all due consideration, I proceed to answer it; and, in order to clear my way,

shall, in the first place, set down my sense of those passages in Scripture, which, on a hasty perusal, seem to clash with the opinion I am going to give—"If a man smite one cheek, turn the other"—"If he take thy cloak, let him take thy coat also." That is, I suppose, rather than on a vindictive principle avail yourself of that remedy the law allows you, in the way of retaliation, for that was the subject immediately under the discussion of the speaker. Nothing is so contrary to the genius of the Gospel as the gratification of resentment and revenge; but I cannot easily persuade myself to think, that the Author of that dispensation could possibly advise his followers to consult their own peace at the expense of the peace of society, or inculcate an universal abstinence from the use of lawful remedies, to the encouragement of injury and oppression.

St. Paul again seems to condemn the practice of going to law—"Why do ye not rather suffer wrong, &c." But if we look again we shall find that a litigious temper had obtained, and was prevalent, among the professors of the day. This he condemned, and with good reason; it was unseemly to the last degree that the disciples of the Prince of Peace should worry and vex each other with injurious treatment and unnecessary disputes, to the scandal of their religion in the eyes of the heathen But surely he did not mean, any more than his Master, in the place above alluded to, that the most harmless members of society should receive no advantage of its laws, or should be the only persons

in the world who should derive no benefit from those institutions without which society cannot subsist. Neither of them could mean to throw down the pale of property, and to lay the Christian part of the world open, throughout all ages, to the incursions of unlimited violence and wrong.

By this time you are sufficiently aware that I think you have an indisputable right to recover at law what is so dishonestly withheld from you. The fellow, I suppose, has discernment enough to see a difference between you and the generality of the clergy, and cunning enough to conceive the purpose of turning your meekness and forbearance to good account, and of coining them into hard cash, which he means to put in his pocket. But I would disappoint him, and shew him that, though a Christian is not to be quarrelsome, he is not to be crushed; and that, though he is but a worm before God, he is not such a worm as every selfish and unprincipled wretch may tread upon at his pleasure.

I lately heard a story from a lady, who spent many years of her life in France, somewhat to the present purpose. An Abbé, universally esteemed for his piety, and especially for the meekness of his manners, had yet undesignedly given some offence to a shabby fellow in his parish. The man, concluding he might do as he pleased with so forgiving and gentle a character, struck him on one cheek, and bade him turn the other. The good man did so, and when he had received the two slaps, which he thought himself obliged to submit to, turned again, and beat him soundly. I do not wish to see

you follow the French gentleman's example, but I believe nobody that has heard the story condemns him much for the spirit he shewed upon the occasion.

I had the relation from Lady Austen, sister to Mrs. Jones, wife of the minister at Clifton. She is a most agreeable woman, and has fallen in love with your mother and me: insomuch, that I do not know but she may settle at Olney. Yesterday se'nnight we all dined together in the *Spinnie*—a most delightful retirement, belonging to Mrs. Throckmorton of Weston. Lady Austen's lacquey, and a lad that waits on me in the garden, drove a wheelbarrow full of eatables and drinkables to the scene of our *fête champêtre*. A board laid over the top of the wheelbarrow, served us for a table; our dining-room was a root-house, lined with moss and ivy. At six o'clock, the servants, who had dined under the great elm upon the ground, at a little distance, boiled the kettle, and the said wheelbarrow served us for a tea-table. We then took a walk into the wilderness, about half a mile off, and were at home again a little after eight, having spent the day together from noon till evening, without one cross occurrence or the least weariness of each other—a happiness few parties of pleasure can boast of.

Yours, with our joint love,

W. C.

TO MRS. NEWTON.*

Olney, August, 1781.

Dear Madam—Though much obliged to you for

* Private Correspondence.

the favour of your last, and ready enough to acknowledge the debt, the present, however, is not a day in which I should have chosen to pay it. A dejection of mind, which perhaps may be removed by to-morrow, rather disqualifies me for writing,—a business I would always perform in good spirits, because melancholy is catching, especially where there is much sympathy to assist the contagion. But certain poultry, which I understand are about to pay their respects to you, have advertised for an agreeable companion, and I find myself obliged to embrace the opportunity of going to town with them in that capacity.

* * * * * *

While the world lasts, fashion will continue to lead it by the nose. And, after all, what can fashion do for its most obsequious followers? It can ring the changes upon the same things, and it can do no more. Whether our hats be white or black, our caps high or low,—whether we wear two watches or one—is of little consequence. There is indeed an appearance of variety; but the folly and vanity that dictate and adopt the change are invariably the same. When the fashions of a particular period appear more reasonable than those of the preceding, it is not because the world is grown more reasonable than it was; but because, in a course of perpetual changes, some of them must sometimes happen to be for the better. Neither do I suppose the preposterous customs that prevail at present a proof of its greater folly. In a few years, perhaps next year, the fine gentleman will shut up his umbrella, and

give it to his sister, filling his hand with a crab-tree cudgel instead of it: and when he has done so, will he be wiser than now? By no means. The love of change will have betrayed him into a propriety, which, in reality, he has no taste for, all his merit on the occasion amounting to no more than this—that, being weary of one plaything, he has taken up another.

In a note I received from Johnson last week, he expresses a wish that my pen may be still employed. Supposing it possible that he would yet be glad to swell the volume, I have given him an order to draw upon me for eight hundred lines, if he chooses it; "Conversation," a piece which I think I mentioned in my last to Mr. Newton, being finished. If Johnson sends for it, I shall transcribe it as soon as I can, and transmit it to Charles-square. Mr. Newton will take the trouble to forward it to the press. It is not a dialogue, as the title would lead you to surmise; nor does it bear the least resemblance to "TableTalk," except that it is serio-comic, like all the rest. My design in it is to convince the world that they make but an indifferent use of their tongues, considering the intention of Providence when he endued them with the faculty of speech; to point out the abuses, which is the jocular part of the business, and to prescribe the remedy, which is the grave and sober.

We felt ourselves not the less obliged to you for the cocoa-nuts, though they were good for nothing. They contained nothing but a putrid liquor, with a

round white lump, which in taste and substance much resembled tallow, and was of the size of a small walnut. Nor am I the less indebted to your kindness for the fish, though none is yet come.

Yours, dear Madam,
Most affectionately,
W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Aug. 16, 1781.

My dear Friend—I might date my letter from the green-house, which we have converted into a summer parlour. The walls hung with garden mats, and the floor covered with a carpet, the sun too in a great measure excluded by an awning of mats, which forbids him to shine any where except upon the carpet, it affords us by far the pleasantest retreat in Olney. We eat, drink, and sleep, where we always did; but here we spend all the rest of our time, and find that the sound of the wind in the trees and the singing of birds are much more agreeable to our ears than the incessant barking of dogs and screaming of children. It is an observation that naturally occurs upon the occasion, and which many other occasions furnish an opportunity to make, that people long for what they have not, and overlook the good in their possession. This is so true in the present instance, that for years past

* Private Correspondence.

I should have thought myself happy to enjoy a retirement even less flattering to my natural taste than this in which I am now writing; and have often looked wistfully at a snug cottage, which, on account of its situation at a distance from noise and disagreeable objects, seemed to promise me all I could wish or expect, so far as happiness may be said to be local; never once adverting to this comfortable nook, which affords me all that could be found in the most sequestered hermitage, with the advantage of having all those accommodations near at hand which no hermitage could possibly afford me. People imagine they should be happy in circumstances which they would find insupportably burthensome in less than a week. A man that has been clothed in fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, envies the peasant under a thatched hovel; who, in return, envies him as much his palace and his pleasure-ground. Could they change situations, the fine gentleman would find his ceilings were too low, and that his casements admitted too much wind; that he had no cellar for his wine, and no wine to put in his cellar These, with a thousand other mortifying deficiencies, would shatter his romantic project into innumerable fragments in a moment. The clown, at the same time, would find the accession of so much unwieldy treasure an incumbrance quite incompatible with an hour's ease. His choice would be puzzled by variety. He would drink to excess, because he would foresee no end of his abundance; and he would eat himself sick for the same reason. He would have no idea of any other

happiness than sensual gratification; would make himself a beast, and die of his good fortune. The rich gentleman had, perhaps, or might have had, if he pleased, at the shortest notice, just such a recess as this; but if he had it, he overlooked it, or, if he had it not, forgot that he might command it whenever he would. The rustic, too, was actually in possession of some blessings, which he was a fool to relinquish, but which he could neither see nor feel, because he had the daily and constant use of them; such as good health, bodily strength, a head and a heart that never ached, and temperance, to the practice of which he was bound by necessity, that, humanly speaking, was a pledge and a security for the continuance of them all.

Thus I have sent you a schoolboy's theme. When I write to you, I do not write without thinking, but always without premeditation: the consequence is, that such thoughts as pass through my head when I am not writing make the subject of my letters to you.

Johnson sent me lately a sort of apology for his printer's negligence, with his promise of greater diligence for the future. There was need enough of both. I have received but one sheet since you left us. Still, indeed, I see that there is time enough before us; but I see likewise that no length of time can be sufficient for the accomplishment of a work that does not go forward. I know not yet whether he will add "Conversation" to those poems already in his hands, nor do I care much. No man ever wrote such quantities of verse as I have

written this last year with so much indifference about the event, or rather with so little ambition of public praise. My pieces are such as may possibly be made useful. The more they are approved the more likely they are to spread, and consequently the more likely to attain the end of usefulness; which, as I said once before, except my present amusement, is the only end I propose. And, even in the pursuit of this purpose, commendable as it is in itself, I have not the spur I should once have had; my labour must go unrewarded, and as Mr. R—— once said, I am raising a scaffold before a house that others are to live in and not I.

I have left myself no room for politics, which I thought, when I began, would have been my principal theme.

Yours, my dear sir,

W. C.

The striking and beautiful imagery, united with the depressive spirit of the following letter, will engage the attention of the discerning reader.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Aug. 21, 1781.

My dear Friend—You wish you could employ your time to better purpose, yet are never idle. In all that you say or do; whether you are alone, or pay visits, or receive them; whether you think,

* Private Correspondence.

or write, or walk, or sit still; the state of your mind is such as discovers even to yourself, in spite of all its wanderings, that there is a principle at bottom whose determined tendency is towards the best things. I do not at all doubt the truth of what you say, when you complain of that crowd of trifling thoughts that pester you without ceasing; but then you always have a serious thought standing at the door of your imagination, like a justice of peace with the riot-act in his hand, ready to read it and disperse the mob. Here lies the difference between you and me. My thoughts are clad in a sober livery, for the most part as grave as that of a bishop's servants. They turn too upon spiritual subjects, but the tallest fellow and the loudest amongst them all, is he who is continually crying with a loud voice, *Actum est de te, periisti.* You wish for more attention, I for less. Dissipation itself would be welcome to me, so it were not a vicious one; but, however earnestly invited, it is coy, and keeps at a distance. Yet, with all this distressing gloom upon my mind, I experience, as you do, the slipperiness of the present hour and the rapidity with which time escapes me. Every thing around us, and every thing that befalls us, constitutes a variety, which, whether agreeable or otherwise, has still a thievish propensity, and steals from us days, months, and years, with such unparalleled address, that even while we say they are here they are gone. From infancy to manhood is rather a tedious period, chiefly, I suppose, because at that time we act under the control of

others, and are not suffered to have a will of our own. But thence downward into the vale of years is such a declivity, that we have just an opportunity to reflect upon the steepness of it and then find ourselves at the bottom.

Here is a new scene opening, which, whether it perform what it promises or not, will add fresh plumes to the wings of time; at least while it continues to be a subject of contemplation. If the project take effect, a thousand varieties will attend the change it will make in our situation at Olney. If not, it will serve, however, to speculate and converse upon, and steal away many hours, by engaging our attention, before it be entirely dropped. Lady Austen, very desirous of retirement, especially of a retirement near her sister, an admirer of Mr. Scott as a preacher, and of your two humble servants now in the green-house as the most agreeable creatures in the world, is at present determined to settle here. That part of our great building which is at present occupied by Dick Coleman, his wife, child, and a thousand rats, is the corner of the world she chooses above all others as the place of her future residence. Next spring twelvemonth she begins to repair and beautify, and the following winter (by which time the lease of her house in town will determine) she intends to take possession. I am highly pleased with the plan upon Mrs. Unwin's account, who, since Mrs. Newton's departure, is destitute of all female connexion, and has not, in any emergency, a woman to speak to. Mrs. Scott is indeed in the

neighbourhood, and an excellent person, but always engaged by a close attention to her family, and no more than ourselves a lover of visiting. But these things are all at present in the clouds. Two years must intervene, and in two years not only this project but all the projects in Europe may be disconcerted.

Cocoa-nut naught,
Fish too dear,
None must be bought
For us that are here;

No lobster on earth,
That ever I saw,
To me would be worth
Sixpence a claw.

So, dear Madam, wait
Till fish can be got
At a reas'nable rate,
Whether lobster or not,

Till the French and the Dutch
Have quitted the seas,
And then send as much,
And as oft as you please.

Yours, my dear Sir,
W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney Aug. 25, 1781.

My dear Friend—We rejoice with you sincerely in the birth of another son, and in the prospect you have of Mrs. Unwin's recovery: may your three

children, and the next three, when they shall make their appearance, prove so many blessings to their parents, and make you wish that you had twice the number! But what made you expect daily that you should hear from me? Letter for letter is the law of all correspondence whatsoever, and, because I wrote last, I have indulged myself for some time in expectation of a sheet from you.—Not that I govern myself entirely by the punctilio of reciprocation, but, having been pretty much occupied of late, I was not sorry to find myself at liberty to exercise my discretion, and furnished with a good excuse if I chose to be silent.

I expected, as you remember, to have been published last spring, and was disappointed. The delay has afforded me an opportunity to increase the quantity of my publication by about a third; and, if my Muse has not forsaken me, which I rather suspect to be the case, may possibly yet add to it. I have a subject in hand, which promises me a great abundance of poetical matter, but which, for want of a something I am not able to describe, I cannot at present proceed with. The name of it is "Retirement," and my purpose, to recommend the proper improvement of it, to set forth the requisites for that end, and to enlarge upon the happiness of that state of life, when managed as it ought to be. In the course of my journey through this ample theme, I should wish to touch upon the characters, the deficiencies, and the mistakes of thousands, who enter on a scene of retirement unqualified for it in every respect, and

with such designs as have no tendency to promote either their own happiness or that of others. But, as I have told you before, there are times when I am no more a poet than I am a mathematician, and when such a time occurs, I always think it better to give up the point than to labour it in vain. I shall yet again be obliged to trouble you for franks, the addition of three thousand lines, or near that number, having occasioned a demand which I did not always foresee, but your obliging friend and your obliging self having allowed me the liberty of application, I make it without apology.

The solitude, or rather the duality, of our condition at Olney seems drawing to a conclusion. You have not forgot perhaps that the building we inhabit consists of two mansions. And, because you have only seen the inside of that part of it which is in our occupation, I therefore inform you that the other end of it is by far the most superb, as well as the most commodious. Lady Austen has seen it, has set her heart upon it, is going to fit it up and furnish it, and, if she can get rid of the remaining two years of the lease of her London house, will probably enter upon it in a twelvemonth. You will be pleased with this intelligence, because I have already told you that she is a woman perfectly well-bred, sensible, and in every respect agreeable; and above all, because she loves your mother dearly. It has in my eyes (and I doubt not it will have the same in yours) strong marks of providential interposition. A female friend, and one who bids fair to prove herself worthy of the appellation, comes recommended by

a variety of considerations to such a place as Olney. Since Mr. Newton went, and till this lady came, there was not in the kingdom a retirement more absolutely such than ours. We did not want company, but when it came we found it agreeable. A person that has seen much of the world and understands it well, has high spirits, a lively fancy, and great readiness of conversation, introduces a sprightliness into such a scene as this, which, if it was peaceful before, is not the worse for being a little enlivened. In case of illness too, to which all are liable, it was rather a gloomy prospect, if we allowed ourselves to advert to it, that there was hardly a woman in the place from whom it would have been reasonable to have expected either comfort or assistance. The present curate's wife is a valuable person, but has a family of her own, and, though a neighbour, is not a very near one. But, if this plan is effected, we shall be in a manner one family, and I suppose never pass a day without some intercourse with each other.

Your mother sends her warm affections, and welcomes into the world the new-born William.

Yours, My dear friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, August 25, 1781.

My dear Friend—By Johnson's last note, (for I have received a packet from him since I wrote last

* Private Correspondence.

to you,) I am ready to suspect that you have seen him, and endeavoured to quicken his proceedings. His assurance of greater expedition leads me to think so. I know little of booksellers and printers, but have heard from others that they are the most dilatory of all people; otherwise, I am not in a hurry, nor would be so troublesome: but am obliged to you nevertheless for your interference, if his promised alacrity be owing to any spur that you have given him. He chooses to add "Conversation" to the rest, and says he will give me notice when he is ready for it; but I shall send it to *you* by the first opportune conveyance, and beg you to deliver it over to him. He wishes me not to be afraid of making the volume too large; by which expression I suppose he means, that if I had still another piece, there would be room for it. At present I have not, but am in the way to produce another, *faveat modo Musa*. I have already begun and proceeded a little way in a poem called "Retirement." My view in choosing that subject is to direct to the proper use of the opportunities it affords for the cultivation of a man's best interests; to censure the vices and the follies which people carry with them into their retreats, where they make no other use of their leisure than to gratify themselves with the indulgence of their favourite appetites, and to pay themselves by a life of pleasure for a life of business. In conclusion, I would enlarge upon the happiness of that state, when discreetly enjoyed and religiously improved. But all this is, at present, in embryo. I generally despair of my progress

when I begin; but if, like my travelling 'squire, I should kindle as I go, this likewise may make a part of the volume, for I have time enough before me

I forgot to mention that Johnson uses the discretion my poetship has allowed him, with much discernment. He has suggested several alterations, or rather marked several defective passages, which I have corrected much to the advantage of the poems. In the last sheet he sent me, he noted three such, all which I have reduced into better order. In the foregoing sheet, I assented to his criticisms in some instances, and chose to abide by the original expression in others. Thus we jog on together comfortably enough: and perhaps it would be as well for authors in general, if their booksellers, when men of some taste, were allowed, though not to tinker the work themselves, yet to point out the flaws and humbly to recommend an improvement.

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, September 9, 1781.

My dear Friend—I am not willing to let the post set off without me, though I have nothing material to put into his bag. I am writing in the greenhouse, where my myrtles, ranged before the windows, make the most agreeable blind imaginable; where I am undisturbed by noise, and where I see

* Private Correspondence.

none but pleasing objects. The situation is as favourable to my purpose as I could wish; but the state of my mind is not so, and the deficiencies I feel there are not to be remedied by the stillness of my retirement or the beauty of the scene before me. I believe it is in part owing to the excessive heat of the weather that I find myself so much at a loss when I attempt either verse or prose: my animal spirits are depressed, and dulness is the consequence. That dulness, however, is all at your service; and the portion of it that is necessary to fill up the present epistle I send you without the least reluctance.

I am sorry to find that the censure I have passed upon Occiduus is even better founded than I supposed. Lady Austen has been at his sabbatical concerts, which, it seems, are composed of song-tunes and psalm-tunes indiscriminately; music without words —and I suppose one may say, consequently, without devotion. On a certain occasion, when her niece was sitting at her side, she asked his opinion concerning the lawfulness of such amusements as are to be found at Vauxhall or Ranelagh; meaning only to draw from him a sentence of disapprobation, that Miss Green might be the better reconciled to the restraint under which she was held, when she found it warranted by the judgment of so famous a divine. But she was disappointed: he accounted them innocent, and recommended them as useful. Curiosity, he said, was natural to young persons; and it was wrong to deny them a gratification which they might be indulged in with the greatest safety;

because, the denial being unreasonable, the desire of it would still subsist. It was but a walk, and a walk was as harmless in one place as another; with other arguments of a similar import, which might have proceeded with more grace, at least with less offence, from the lips of a sensual layman. He seems, together with others of our acquaintance, to have suffered considerably in his spiritual character by his attachment to music. The lawfulness of it, when used with moderation, and in its proper place, is unquestionable; but I believe that wine itself, though a man be guilty of habitual intoxication, does not more debauch and befool the natural understanding, than music, always music, music in season and out of season, weakens and destroys the spiritual discernment. If it is not used with an unfeigned reference to the worship of God, and with a design to assist the soul in the performance of it, which cannot be the case when it is the only occupation, it degenerates into a sensual delight, and becomes a most powerful advocate for the admission of other pleasures, grosser perhaps in degree, but in their kind the same.*

Mr. M——, though a simple, honest, good man —such, at least, he appears to us—is not likely to give general satisfaction. He preaches the truth, it seems, but not the whole truth; and a certain member of that church, who signed the letter of

* It is recorded of the Rev. Mr. Cecil, that, being passionately fond of playing on the violin, and, finding that it engrossed too much of his time and thoughts, he one day took it into his hands and broke it to pieces.

invitation, which was conceived in terms sufficiently encouraging, is likely to prove one of his most strenuous opposers. The little man, however, has an independent fortune, and has nothing to do but to trundle himself away to some other place, where he may find hearers neither so nice nor so wise as we are at Olney.

Yours, my dear Sir,
With our united love,
W. C.

TO MRS. NEWTON.*

Olney, Sept. 16, 1781.

A noble theme demands a noble verse,
In such I thank you for your fine oysters.
The barrel was magnificently large,
But, being sent to Olney at free charge,
Was not inserted in the driver's list,
And therefore overlook'd, forgot, or miss'd;
For, when the messenger whom we dispatch'd
Inquir'd for oysters, Hob his noddle scratch'd;
Denying that his waggon or his wain
Did any such commodity contain.
In consequence of which, your welcome boon
Did not arrive till yesterday at noon;
In consequence of which some chanc'd to die,
And some, though very sweet, were very dry.
Now Madam says, (and what she says must still
Deserve attention, say she what she will,)
That what we call the diligence, be-case
It goes to London with a swifter pace,
Would better suit the carriage of your gift,
Returning downward with a pace as swift;
And therefore recommends it with this aim—
To save at least three days,—the price the same,

* Private Correspondence.

For though it will not carry or convey
For less than twelve pence, send whate'er you may,
For oysters bred upon the salt sea-shore,
Pack'd in a barrel, they will charge no more.

News have I none that I can deign to write,
Save that it rain'd prodigiously last night;
And that ourselves were, at the seventh hour,
Caught in the first beginning of the show'r;
But walking, running, and with much ado,
Got home—just time enough to be wet through.
Yet both are well, and, wond'rous to be told,
Soused as we were, we yet have caught no cold;
And wishing just the same good hap to you,
We say, good Madam, and good Sir, adieu!

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

The Greenhouse, Sept. 18, 1781.

My dear Friend—I return your preface, with many thanks for so affectionate an introduction to the public. I have observed nothing that in my judgment required alteration, except a single sentence in the first paragraph, which I have not obliterated, that you may restore it, if you please, by obliterating my interlineation. My reason for proposing an amendment of it was, that your meaning did not immediately strike me, which therefore I have endeavoured to make more obvious. The rest is what I would wish it to be. You say, indeed, more in my commendation than I can modestly say of myself: but something will be allowed to the partiality of friendship on so interesting an occasion.

* Private Correspondence.

I have no objection in the world to your conveying a copy to Dr. Johnson; though I well know that one of his pointed sarcasms, if he should happen to be displeased, would soon find its way into all companies and spoil the sale. He writes, indeed, like a man that thinks a great deal, and that sometimes thinks religiously: but report informs me that he has been severe enough in his animadversions upon Dr. Watts, who was nevertheless, if I am in any degree a judge of verse, a man of true poetical ability; careless, indeed, for the most part, and inattentive too often to those niceties which constitute elegance of expression, but frequently sublime in his conceptions and masterly in his execution. Pope, I have heard, had placed him once in the Dunciad; but, on being advised to read before he judged him, was convinced that he deserved other treatment, and thrust somebody's blockhead into the gap, whose name, consisting of a monosyllable, happened to fit it. Whatever faults, however, I may be chargeable with as a poet, I cannot accuse myself of negligence. I never suffer a line to pass till I have made it as good as I can; and, though my doctrines may offend this king of critics, he will not, I flatter myself, be disgusted by slovenly inaccuracy, either in the numbers, rhymes, or language. Let the rest take its chance. It is possible he may be pleased; and, if he should, I shall have engaged on my side one of the best trumpeters in the kingdom. Let him only speak as favourably of me as he has spoken of Sir Richard Blackmore (who, though he shines in his poem called Creation, has written more

absurdities in verse than any writer of our country,) and my success will be secured.

I have often promised myself a laugh with you about your pipe, but have always forgotten it when I have been writing, and at present I am not much in a laughing humour. You will observe, however, for your comfort and the honour of that same pipe, that it hardly falls within the line of my censure. You never fumigate the ladies, or force them out of company; nor do you use it as an incentive to hard drinking. Your friends, indeed, have reason to complain that it frequently deprives them of the pleasure of your own conversation while it leads you either into your study or your garden; but in all other respects it is as innocent a pipe as can be. Smoke away, therefore; and remember that, if one poet has condemned the practice, a better than he (the witty and elegant Hawkins Browne) has been warm in the praise of it.

"Retirement" grows, but more slowly than any of its predecessors. Time was when I could with ease produce fifty, sixty, or seventy lines in a morning: now, I generally fall short of thirty, and am sometimes forced to be content with a dozen. It consists at present, I suppose, of between six and seven hundred; so that there are hopes of an end, and I dare say Johnson will give me time enough to finish it.

I nothing add but this—that *still I am*
Your most affectionate and humble

WILLIAM.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.*

Olney, Sept. 26, 1781.

My dear Friend—I may, I suppose, congratulate you on your safe arrival at Brighthelmstone; and am the better pleased with your design to close the summer there, because I am acquainted with the place, and, by the assistance of fancy, can without much difficulty join myself to the party, and partake with you in your amusements and excursions. It happened singularly enough, that, just before I received your last, in which you apprise me of your intended journey, I had been writing upon the subject, having found occasion, towards the close of my last poem, called "Retirement," to take some notice of the modern passion for sea-side entertainments, and to direct to the means by which they might be made useful as well as agreeable. I think with you, that the most magnificent object under heaven is the great deep; and cannot but feel an unpolite species of astonishment, when I consider the multitudes that view it without emotion and even without reflection. In all its various forms, it is an object of all others the most suited to affect us with lasting impressions of the awful Power that created and controls it. I am the less inclined to think this negligence excusable, because, at a time of life when I gave as little attention to religious subjects as almost any man, I yet remember that the waves would preach

* Private Correspondence.

to me, and that in the midst of dissipation I had an ear to hear them. One of Shakspeare's characters says, "I am never merry when I hear sweet music." The same effect that harmony seems to have had upon him I have experienced from the sight and sound of the ocean, which have often composed my thoughts into a melancholy not unpleasing nor without its use. So much for Signor Nettuno.

Lady Austen goes to London this day se'nnight. We have told her that you shall visit her; which is an enterprise you may engage in with the more alacrity, because, as she loves every thing that has any connexion with your mother, she is sure to feel a sufficient partiality for her son. Add to this that your own personal recommendations are by no means small, or such as a woman of her fine taste and discernment can possibly overlook. She has many features in her character which you will admire; but one, in particular, on account of the rarity of it, will engage your attention and esteem. She has a degree of gratitude in her composition, so quick a sense of obligation, as is hardly to be found in any rank of life, and, if report say true, is scarce indeed in the superior. Discover but a wish to please her, and she never forgets it; not only thanks you, but the tears will start into her eyes at the recollection of the smallest service. With these fine feelings, she has the most, and the most harmless, vivacity you can imagine. In short, she is—what you will find her to be, upon half an hour's conversation with her; and, when I hear you have a journey to town in contemplation, I will send you her address.

Your mother is well, and joins with me in wishing that you may spend your time agreeably upon the coast of Sussex.

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Oct. 4, 1781.

My dear Friend—I generally write the day before the post, but yesterday had no opportunity, being obliged to employ myself in settling my greenhouse for the winter. I am now writing before breakfast, that I may avail myself of every inch of time for the purpose. N. B. An expression a critic would quarrel with, and call it by some hard name, signifying a jumble of ideas and an unnatural match between time and space.

I am glad to be undeceived respecting the opinion I had been erroneously led into on the subject of Johnson's criticism on Watts. Nothing can be more judicious, or more characteristic of a distinguishing taste, than his observations upon that writer; though I think him a little mistaken in his notion that divine subjects have never been poetically treated with success. A little more Christian knowledge and experience would perhaps enable him to discover excellent poetry upon spiritual themes in the aforesaid little Doctor. I perfectly acquiesce in the propriety of sending Johnson a copy of my productions; and I think it would be

* Private Correspondence.

well to send it in our joint names, accompanied with a handsome card, such a one as you will know how to fabricate, and such as may predispose him to a favourable perusal of the book, by coaxing him into a good temper; for he is a great bear, with all his learning and penetration.*

I forgot to tell you in my last that I was well pleased with your proposed appearance in the title-page under the name of the editor. I do not care under how many names you appear in a book that calls me its author. In my last piece, which I finished the day before yesterday, I have told the public that I live upon the banks of the Ouse: that public is a great simpleton if it does not know that you live in London; it will consequently know that I had need of the assistance of some friend in town, and that I could have recourse to nobody with more propriety than yourself. I shall transcribe and submit to your approbation as fast as possible. I have now, I think, finished my volume; indeed I am almost weary of composing, having spent a year in doing nothing else. I reckon my volume will consist of about eight thousand lines.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

* Goldsmith used to say of Johnson, that he had nothing of the bear but the external roughness of its coat.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Oct. 6, 1781.

My dear Friend—What a world are you daily conversant with, which I have not seen these twenty years, and shall never see again! The arts of dissipation (I suppose) are no where practised with more refinement or success than at the place of your present residence. By your account of it, it seems to be just what it was when I visited it,—a scene of idleness and luxury, music, dancing, cards, walking, riding, bathing, eating, drinking, coffee, tea, scandal, dressing, yawning, sleeping, the rooms perhaps more magnificent, because the proprietors are grown richer, but the manners and occupations of the company just the same. Though my life has long been that of a recluse, I have not the temper of one, nor am I in the least an enemy to cheerfulness and good-humour; but I cannot envy you your situation; I even feel myself constrained to prefer the silence of this nook, and the snug fireside in our own diminutive parlour, to all the splendour and gaiety of Brighron.

You ask me how I feel on the occasion of my approaching publication? Perfectly at my ease. If I had not been pretty well assured beforehand that my tranquillity would be but little endangered by such a measure, I would never have engaged in it; for I cannot bear disturbance. I have had in view two principal objects; first, to amuse myself, and, secondly, to compass that point in such a manner that others might possibly be the better for my

amusement. If I have succeeded, it will give me pleasure; but, if I have failed, I shall not be mortified to the degree that might perhaps be expected. I remember an old adage (though not where it is to be found) "*bene vixit, qui bene latuit,*" and, if I had recollected it at the right time, it should have been the motto to my book. By the way, it will make an excellent one for "Retirement," if you can but tell me whom to quote for it. The critics cannot deprive me of the pleasure I have in reflecting, that, so far as my leisure has been employed in writing for the public, it has been conscientiously employed, and with a view to their advantage. There is nothing agreeable, to be sure, in being chronicled for a dunce; but, I believe, there lives not a man upon earth who would be less affected by it than myself. With all this indifference to fame, which you know me too well to suppose me capable of affecting, I have taken the utmost pains to deserve it. This may appear a mystery or a paradox in practice, but it is true. I considered that the taste of the day is refined and delicate to excess, and that to disgust that delicacy of taste, by a slovenly inattention to it, would be to forfeit, at once, all hope of being useful; and for this reason, though I have written more verse this last year than perhaps any man in England, I have finished, and polished, and touched, and retouched, with the utmost care. If after all I should be converted into waste paper, it may be my misfortune, but it will not be my fault. I shall bear it with the most perfect serenity.

I do not mean to give —— a copy; he is a good-natured little man, and crows exactly like a cock, but knows no more of verse than the cock he imitates.

Whoever supposes that Lady Austen's fortune is precarious is mistaken. I can assure you, upon the ground of the most circumstantial and authentic information, that it is both genteel and perfectly safe.

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Oct. 14, 1781.

My dear Friend—I would not willingly deprive you of any comfort, and therefore would wish you to comfort yourself as much as you can with a notion that you are a more bountiful correspondent than I. You will give me leave in the mean time, however, to assert to myself a share in the same species of consolation, and to enjoy the flattering recollection that I have sometimes written three letters to your one. I never knew a poet, except myself, who was punctual in any thing, or to be depended on for the due discharge of any duty, except what he thought he owed to the Muses. The moment a man takes it into his foolish head that he has what the world calls genius, he gives himself a discharge from the servile drudgery of all friendly offices, and becomes good for nothing ex-

* Private Correspondence.

cept in the pursuit of his favourite employment. But I am not yet vain enough to think myself entitled to such self-conferred honours; and, though I have sent much poetry to the press, or, at least, what I hope my readers will account such, am still as desirous as ever of a place in your heart, and to take all opportunities to convince you that you have still the same in mine. My attention to my poetical function has, I confess, a little interfered of late with my other employments, and occasioned my writing less frequently than I should have otherwise done. But it is over, at least for the present, and I think for some time to come. I have transcribed "Retirement," and send it. You will be so good as to forward it to Johnson, who will forward it, I suppose, to the public, in his own time; but not very speedily, moving as he does. The post brought me a sheet this afternoon, but we have not yet reached the end of "Hope."

Mr. Scott, I perceive by yours to him, has mentioned one of his troubles, but, I believe, not the principal one. The question, whether he shall have an assistant at the great house in Mr. R——, is still a question, or, at least, a subject of discontent between Mr. Scott and the people. In a *tête-à-tête* I had with this candidate for the chair in the course of the last week, I told him my thoughts upon the subject plainly; advised him to change places, by the help of fancy, with Mr. Scott, for a moment, and to ask himself how *he* would like a self-intruded deputy; advised him likewise by no means to ad-

dress Mr. Scott any more upon the matter, for that he might be sure he would never consent to it; and concluded with telling him that, if he persisted in his purpose of speaking to the people, the probable consequence would be that, sooner or later, Mr. Scott would be forced out of the parish, and the blame of his expulsion would all light upon him. He heard, approved, and I think the very next day put all my good counsel to shame, at least, a considerable part of it, by applying to Mr. Scott, in company with Mr. P——, for his permission to speak at the Sunday evening lecture. Mr. Scott, as I had foretold, was immoveable; but offered, for the satisfaction of his hearers, to preach three times to them on the Sabbath, which he could have done, Mr. Jones having kindly offered, though without their knowledge, to officiate for him at Weston. Mr. R. answered, "That will not do, Sir; it is not what the people wish; they want variety." Mr. Scott replied very wisely, "If they do, they must be content without it; it is not my duty to indulge that humour." This is the last intelligence I have had upon the subject. I received it not from Mr. Scott, but from an ear-witness.

I did not suspect, till the reviewers told me so, that you are made up of artifice and design, and that your ambition is to delude your hearers. Well, I suppose they please themselves with the thought of having mortified you; but how much are they mistaken! They shot at you, and their arrow struck the Bible, recoiling, of course, upon them-

selves. My turn will come, for I think I shall hardly escape a threshing.

Yours, my dear sir,
And Mrs. Newton's,
W. C.

TO MRS. COWPER.

Olney, Oct. 19, 1781.

My dear Cousin—Your fear lest I should think you unworthy of my correspondence, on account of your delay to answer, may change sides now, and more properly belongs to me. It is long since I received your last, and yet I believe I can say truly, that not a post has gone by me since the receipt of it that has not reminded me of the debt I owe you for your obliging and unreserved communications both in prose and verse, especially for the latter, because I consider them as marks of your peculiar confidence. The truth is, I have been such a verse-maker myself, and so busy in preparing a volume for the press, which I imagine will make its appearance in the course of the winter, that I hardly had leisure to listen to the calls of any other engagement. It is, however, finished, and gone to the printer's, and I have nothing now to do with it but to correct the sheets as they are sent to me, and consign it over to the judgment of the public. It is a bold undertaking at this time of day, when so many writers of the greatest abilities have gone before, who seem to have anticipated every valuable subject, as well as all the graces of poetical embellishment, to step

forth into the world in the character of a bard, especially when it is considered that luxury, idleness, and vice, have debauched the public taste, and that nothing hardly is welcome but childish fiction, or what has, at least, a tendency to excite a laugh. I thought, however, that I had stumbled upon some subjects that had never before been poetically treated, and upon some others to which I imagined it would not be difficult to give an air of novelty by the manner of treating them. My sole drift is to be useful; a point which, however, I knew I should in vain aim at, unless I could be likewise entertaining. I have therefore fixed these two strings upon my bow, and by the help of both have done my best to send the arrow to the mark. My readers will hardly have begun to laugh, before they will be called upon to correct that levity and peruse me with a more serious air. As to the effect, I leave it alone in His hands who can alone produce it; neither prose nor verse can reform the manners of a dissolute age, much less can they inspire a sense of religious obligation, unless assisted and made efficacious by the Power who superintends the truth he has vouchsafed to impart.

You made my heart ache with a sympathetic sorrow when you described the state of your mind on occasion of your late visit into Hertfordshire. Had I been previously informed of your journey before you made it, I should have been able to have foretold all your feelings with the most unerring certainty of prediction. You will never cease to feel upon that subject, but, with your principles of resig-

nation and acquiescence in the divine will, you will always feel as becomes a Christian. We are forbidden to murmur, but we are not forbidden to regret; and whom we loved tenderly while living, we may still pursue with an affectionate remembrance, without having any occasion to charge ourselves with rebellion against the sovereignty that appointed a separation. A day is coming when, I am confident, you will see and know that mercy to both parties was the principal agent in a scene, the recollection of which is still painful.

W. C.

Those who read what the poet has here said of his intended publication may perhaps think it strange that it was introduced to the world with a preface, not written by himself but by his friend Mr. Newton. The circumstance arose from two amiable peculiarities in the character of Cowper—his extreme diffidence in regard to himself, and his kind eagerness to gratify the affectionate ambition of a friend whom he tenderly esteemed! Mr. Newton has avowed this feeling in a very ingenuous and candid manner. He seems not to have been insensible to the honour of presenting himself to the public as the bosom friend of that incomparable author whom he had attended so faithfully in sickness and sorrow.

In the course of the following letters, the reader will find occasion to admire the grateful delicacy of the poet, not only towards the writer of his preface, but even in the liberal praise with which he speaks of his publisher.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Oct. 22, 1781.

My dear Friend—Mr. Bates, without intending it, has passed a severer censure upon the modern world of readers, than any that can be found in my volume. If they are so merrily disposed, in the midst of a thousand calamities, that they will not deign to read a preface of three or four pages, because the purport of it is serious, they are far gone indeed, and in the last stage of a frenzy, such as I suppose has prevailed in all nations that have been exemplarily punished, just before the infliction of the sentence. But, though he lives in the world he has so ill an opinion of, and ought therefore to know it better than I, who have no intercourse with it at all, I am willing to hope that he may be mistaken. Curiosity is a universal passion. There are few people who think a book worth their reading, but feel a desire to know something about the writer of it. This desire will naturally lead them to peep into the preface, where they will soon find that a little perseverance will furnish them with some information on the subject. If, therefore, your preface finds no readers, I shall take it for granted that it is because the book itself is accounted not worth their notice. Be that as it may, it is quite sufficient that I have played the antic myself for their diversion; and that, in a state of dejection such as they are absolute strangers to, I have sometimes put on an air of cheerfulness and

* Private Correspondence.

vivacity, to which I myself am in reality a stranger, for the sake of winning their attention to more useful matter. I cannot endure the thought for a moment, that you should descend to my level on the occasion, and court their favour in a style not more unsuitable to your function than to the constant and consistent train of your whole character and conduct. No—let the preface stand. I cannot mend it. I could easily make a jest of it, but it is better as it is.

By the way—will it not be proper, as you have taken some notice of the modish dress I wear in "Table Talk" to include "Conversation" in the same description, which is (the first half of it, at least,) the most airy of the two? They will otherwise think, perhaps, that the observation might as well have been spared entirely; though I should have been sorry if it had, for when I am jocular I do violence to myself, and am therefore pleased with your telling them in a civil way that I play the fool to amuse them, not because I am one myself, but because I have a foolish world to deal with.

I am inclined to think that Mr. Scott will no more be troubled by Mr. R—— with applications of the sort I mentioned in my last. Mr. Scott, since I wrote that account, has related to us himself what passed in the course of their interview; and, it seems, the discourse ended with his positive assurance that he never would consent to the measure, though, at the same time, he declared he would never interrupt or attempt to suppress it. To which Mr. R—— replied, that unless he had his free con-

sent, he should never engage in the office. It is to be hoped, therefore, that, in time, that part of the people who may at present be displeased with Mr. Scott for withholding his consent, will grow cool upon the subject, and be satisfied with receiving their instruction from their proper minister.

I beg you will, on no future occasion, leave a blank for Mrs. Newton, unless you have first engaged her promise to fill it; for thus we lose the pleasure of your company, without being indemnified for the loss by the acquisition of hers. Our love to you both

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Nov. 5, 1781.

My dear William—I give you joy of your safe return from the lips of the great deep. You did not discern many signs of sobriety or true wisdom among the people of Brighthelmstone, but it is not possible to observe the manners of a multitude, of whatever rank, without learning something: I mean, if a man has a mind like yours, capable of reflection. If he sees nothing to imitate, he is sure to see something to avoid; if nothing to congratulate his fellow-creatures upon, at least much to excite his compassion. There is not, I think, so melancholy a sight in the world (an hospital is not to be compared with it) as that of a thousand persons distinguished

by the name of gentry, who, gentle perhaps by nature, and made more gentle by education, have the appearance of being innocent and inoffensive, yet being destitute of all religion, or not at all governed by the religion they profess, are none of them at any great distance from an eternal state, where self-deception will be impossible and where amusements cannot enter. Some of them, we may say, will be reclaimed—it is most probable indeed that some of them will, because mercy, if one may be allowed the expression, is fond of distinguishing itself by seeking its objects among the most desperate class; but the Scripture gives no encouragement to the warmest charity to hope for deliverance for them all. When I see an afflicted and unhappy man, I say to myself, There is perhaps a man whom the world would envy, if they knew the value of his sorrows, which are possibly intended only to soften his heart, and to turn his affections towards their proper centre. But, when I see or hear of a crowd of voluptuaries, who have no ears but for music, no eyes but for splendour, and no tongue but for impertinence and folly—I say, or at least I see occasion to say—This is madness—this persisted in must have a tragical conclusion. It will condemn you, not only as Christians unworthy of the name, but as intelligent creatures. You know by the light of nature, if you have not quenched it, that there is a God, and that a life like yours cannot be according to his will.

I ask no pardon of you for the gravity and gloominess of these reflections, which I stumbled on when I least expected it; though, to say the

truth, these or others of a like complexion are sure to occur to me when I think of a scene of public diversion like that you have lately left.

I am inclined to hope that Johnson told you the truth, when he said he should publish me soon after Christmas. His press has been rather more punctual in its remittances than it used to be; we have now but little more than two of the longest pieces, and the small ones that are to follow, by way of epilogue, to print off, and then the affair is finished. But once more I am obliged to gape for franks; only these, which I hope will be the last I shall want, at yours and Mr. ——'s convenient leisure.

We rejoice that you have so much reason to be satisfied with John's proficiency. The more spirit he has the better, if his spirit is but manageable, and put under such management as your prudence and Mrs. Unwin's will suggest. I need not guard you against severity, of which I conclude there is no need, and which I am sure you are not at all inclined to practise without it; but perhaps if I was to whisper, beware of too much indulgence, I should only give a hint that the fondness of a father for a fine boy might seem to justify. I have no particular reason for the caution, at this distance it is not possible I should, but, in a case like yours, an admonition of that sort seldom wants propriety.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Nov. 7, 1781.

My dear Friend—Having discontinued the practice of verse-making for some weeks, I now feel quite incapable of resuming it; and can only wonder at it as one of the most extraordinary incidents in my life that I should have composed a volume. Had it been suggested to me as a practicable thing in better days, though I should have been glad to have found it so, many hindrances would have conspired to withhold me from such an enterprise. I should not have dared, at that time of day, to have committed my name to the public, and my reputation to the hazard of their opinion. But it is otherwise with me now. I am more indifferent about what may touch me in that point than ever I was in my life. The stake that would then have seemed important now seems trivial; and it is of little consequence to me, who no longer feel myself possessed of what I accounted infinitely more valuable, whether the world's verdict shall pronounce me a poet, or an empty pretender to the title. This happy coldness towards a matter so generally interesting to all rhymers left me quite at liberty for the undertaking, unfettered by fear, and under no restraints of that diffidence which is my natural temper, and which would either have made it impossible for me to commence an author by name, or would have insured my miscarriage if I had. In my last despatches to Johnson I sent him a new

* Private Correspondence.

edition of the title-page, having discarded the Latin paradox which stood at the head of the former, and added a French motto to that from Virgil. It is taken from a volume of the excellent Caraccioli, called *Jouissance de soi-même*, and strikes me as peculiarly apposite to my purpose.

Mr. Bull is an honest man. We have seen him twice since he received your orders to march hither, and faithfully told us it was in consequence of those orders that he came. He dined with us yesterday; we were all in pretty good spirits, and the day passed very agreeably. It is not long since he called on Mr. Scott. Mr. R—— came in. Mr. Bull began, addressing himself to the former, "My friend, you are in trouble; you are unhappy; I read it in your countenance." Mr. Scott replied, he had been so, but he was better. "Come then," says Mr. Bull, "I will expound to you the cause of all your anxiety. You are too common; you make yourself cheap. Visit your people less, and converse more with your own heart. How often do you speak to them in the week?" Thrice.—"Ay, there it is. Your sermons are an old ballad; your prayers are an old ballad; and you are an old ballad too."—I would wish to tread in the steps of Mr. Newton.—"You do well to follow his steps in all other instances, but in this instance you are wrong, and so was he. Mr. Newton trod a path which no man but himself could have used so long as he did, and he wore it out long before he went from Olney. Too much familiarity and condescension cost him the estimation of his people. He thought he should insure their love,

to which he had the best possible title, and by those very means he lost it. Be wise, my friend; take warning; make yourself scarce, if you wish that persons of little understanding should know how to prize you."

When he related to us this harangue, so nicely adjusted to the case of the third person present, it did us both good, and as Jacques says,

"It made my lungs to crow like chanticleer."

Our love of you both, though often sent to London, is still with us. If it is not an inexhaustible well, (there is but one love that can with propriety be called so,) it is, however, a very deep one, and not likely to fail while we are living.

Yours, my dear Sir,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Nov. 24, 1781.

My dear Friend—News is always acceptable, especially from another world. I cannot tell you what has been done in the Chesapeake, but I can tell you what has passed in West Wycombe, in this county. Do you feel yourself disposed to give credit to the story of an apparition? No, say you. I am of your mind. I do not believe more than one in a hundred of those tales with which old women frighten children, and teach children to frighten each other. But you are not such a philosopher, I suppose, as to have persuaded yourself that an apparition is an impossible thing. You can attend to

* Private Correspondence.

a story of that sort, if well authenticated? Yes. Then I can tell you one.

You have heard, no doubt, of the romantic friendship that subsisted once between Paul Whitehead, and Lord le Despenser, the late Sir Francis Dashwood.—When Paul died, he left his lordship a legacy. It was his heart, which was taken out of his body, and sent as directed. His friend, having built a church, and at that time just finished it, used it as a mausoleum upon this occasion; and, having (as I think the newspapers told us at the time) erected an elegant pillar in the centre of it, on the summit of this pillar, enclosed in a golden urn, he placed the heart in question; but not as a lady places a china figure upon her mantel-tree, or on the top of her cabinet, but with much respectful ceremony and all the forms of funeral solemnity. He hired the best singers and the best performers. He composed an anthem for the purpose; he invited all the nobility and gentry in the country to assist at the celebration of these obsequies, and, having formed them all into an august procession, marched to the place appointed at their head, and consigned the posthumous treasure, with his own hands, to its state of honourable elevation. Having thus, as he thought, and as he might well think, (* * * *) appeased the manes of the deceased, he rested satisfied with what he had done, and supposed his friend would rest. But not so,—about a week since I received a letter from a person who cannot have been misinformed, telling me that Paul has appeared frequently of late, and that there are few, if any,

of his lordship's numerous household, who have not seen him, sometimes in the park, sometimes in the garden, as well as in the house, by day and by night, indifferently. I make no reflection upon this incident, having other things to write about and but little room.

I am much indebted to Mr. S—— for more franks, and still more obliged by the handsome note with which he accompanied them. He has furnished me sufficiently for the present occasion, and, by his readiness and obliging manner of doing it, encouraged me to have recourse to him, in case another exigence of the same kind should offer. A French author I was reading last night says, He that has written will write again. If the critics do not set their foot upon this first egg that I have laid and crush it, I shall probably verify his observation; and, when I feel my spirits rise, and that I am armed with industry sufficient for the purpose, undertake the production of another volume. At present, however, I do not feel myself so disposed; and, indeed, he that would write should read, not that he may retail the observations of other men, but that, being thus refreshed and replenished, he may find himself in a condition to make and to produce his own. I reckon it among my principal advantages, as a composer of verses, that I have not read an English poet these thirteen years, and but one these twenty years. Imitation, even of the best models, is my aversion; it is servile and mechanical, a trick that has enabled many to usurp the name of author, who could not have written at all, if they had not

written upon the pattern of somebody indeed original. But when the ear and the taste have been much accustomed to the manner of others, it is almost impossible to avoid it; and we imitate, in spite of ourselves, just in proportion as we admire. But enough of this.

Your mother, who is as well as the season of the year will permit, desires me to add her love.—The salmon you sent us arrived safe and was remarkably fresh. What a comfort it is to have a friend who knows that we love salmon, and who cannot pass by a fishmonger's shop without finding his desire to send us some a temptation too strong to be resisted!

Yours, my dear friend,
W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Nov. 26, 1781.

My dear Friend—I thank you much for your letter, which, without obliging me to travel to Wargrave at a time of year when journeying is not very agreeable, has introduced me, in the most commodious manner, to a perfect acquaintance with your neat little garden, your old cottage, and, above all, your most prudent and sagacious landlady. As much as I admire her, I admire much more that philosophical temper with which you seem to treat her; for I know few characters more provoking, to me at

* Private Correspondence.

least, than the selfish, who are never honest, especially if, while they determine to pick your pocket, they have not ingenuity enough to conceal their purpose. But you are perfectly in the right, and act just as I would endeavour to do on the same occasion. You sacrifice every thing to a retreat you admire, and, if the natural indolence of my disposition did not forsake me, so would I.

You might as well apologize for sending me forty pounds, as for writing about yourself. Of the two ingredients, I hardly know which made your letter the most agreeable, (observe, I do not say the most acceptable.) The draft, indeed, was welcome; but, though it was so, yet it did not make me laugh. I laughed heartily at the account you give me of yourself, and your landlady, Dame Saveall, whose picture you have drawn, though not with a flattering hand, yet, I dare say, with a strong resemblance. As to you, I have never seen so much of you since I saw you in London, where you and I have so often made ourselves merry with each other's humour, yet never gave each other a moment's pain by doing so. We are both humourists, and it is well for your wife and my Mrs. Unwin that they have alike found out the way to deal with us.

More thanks to Mrs. Hill for her intentions. She has the true enthusiasm of a gardener, and I can pity her under her disappointment, having so large a share of that commodity myself.

Yours, my dear Sir, affectionately,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Nov. 26, 1781

My dear Friend—I wrote to you by the last post, supposing you at Stock; but, lest that letter should not follow you to Laytonstone, and you should suspect me of unreasonable delay, and lest the frank you have sent me should degenerate into waste paper and perish upon my hands, I write again. The former letter, however, containing all my present stock of intelligence, it is more than possible that this may prove a blank, or but little worthy your acceptance. You will do me the justice to suppose that, if I could be very entertaining I would be so, because, by giving me credit for such a willingness to please, you only allow me a share of that universal vanity which inclines every man, upon all occasions, to exhibit himself to the best advantage. To say the truth, however, when I write, as I do to you, not about business, nor on any subject that approaches to that description, I mean much less my correspondent's amusement, which my modesty will not always permit me to hope for, than my own. There is a pleasure annexed to the communication of one's ideas, whether by word of mouth or by letter, which nothing earthly can supply the place of; and it is the delight we find in this mutual intercourse that not only proves us to be creatures intended for social life, but more than any thing else, perhaps, fits us for it. I have no patience with philosophers: they, one and all, suppose (at least I understand it to be

a prevailing opinion among them) that man's weakness, his necessities, his inability to stand alone, have furnished the prevailing motive, under the influence of which he renounced at first a life of solitude and became a gregarious creature. It seems to me more reasonable, as well as more honourable to my species, to suppose that generosity of soul and a brotherly attachment to our own kind drew us, as it were, to one common centre, taught us to build cities and inhabit them, and welcome every stranger that would cast in his lot amongst us, that we might enjoy fellowship with each other and the luxury of reciprocal endearments, without which a paradise could afford no comfort. There are indeed all sorts of characters in the world; there are some whose understandings are so sluggish, and whose hearts are such mere clods, that they live in society without either contributing to the sweets of it or having any relish for them. A man of this stamp passes by our window continually; I never saw him conversing with a neighbour but once in my life, though I have known him by sight these twelve years; he is of a very sturdy make, and has a round protuberance, which he evidently considers as his best friend, because it is his only companion, and it is the labour of his life to fill it. I can easily conceive that it is merely the love of good eating and drinking, and now and then the want of a new pair of shoes, that attaches this man so much to the neighbourhood of his fellow mortals; for suppose these exigencies and others of a like kind to subsist no longer, and what is there

that could give society the preference in his esteem? He might strut about with his two thumbs upon his hips in the wilderness; he could hardly be more silent than he is at Olney; and, for any advantage of comfort, of friendship, or brotherly affection, he could not be more destitute of such blessings there than in his present situation. But other men have something more to satisfy; there are the yearnings of the heart, which, let the philosophers say what they will, are more importunate than all the necessities of the body, that will not suffer a creature worthy to be called human to be content with an insulated life, or to look for his friends among the beasts of the forest.* Yourself, for instance! It is not because there are no tailors or pastrycooks to be found upon Salisbury plain, that you do not choose it for your abode, but because you are a philanthropist; because you are susceptible of social impressions; and have a pleasure in doing a kindness when you can. Now, upon the word of a poor creature, I have said all that I have said, without the least intention to say one word of it when I began. But thus it is with my thoughts—when you shake a crab-tree the fruit falls; good for nothing indeed when you have got it, but still the best that is to be expected from a crab-tree. You are welcome to them, such as they are; and, if you approve my sentiments, tell the philosophers of the day that I have outshot them all, and have discovered the true origin of society when I least looked for it.

W. C.

* "There is a solitude of the gods, and there is the solitude of wild beasts."

TO THE REV. JONH NEWTON.*

Olney, Nov. 27, 1781.

My dear Friend—First Mr. Wilson, then Mr. Teedon, and lastly Mr. Whitford, each with a cloud of melancholy on his brow and with a mouth wide open, have just announced to us this unwelcome intelligence from America. We are sorry to hear it, and should be more cast down than we are, if we did not know that this catastrophe was ordained beforehand, and that therefore neither conduct, nor courage, nor any means that can possibly be mentioned, could have prevented it. If the king and his ministry can be contented to close the business here, and, taking poor Dean Tucker's advice, resign the Americans into the hands of their new masters, it may be well for Old England. But, if they will still persevere, they will find it, I doubt, a hopeless contest to the last. Domestic murmurs will grow louder, and the hands of faction, being strengthened by this late miscarriage, will find it easy to set fire to the pile of combustibles they have been so long employed in building. These are my politics, and, for aught I can see, you and we, by our respective firesides, though neither connected with men in power, nor professing to possess any share of that sagacity which thinks itself qualified to wield the affairs of kingdoms, can make as probable conjectures, and look forward into futurity with as clear a sight, as the greatest man in the cabinet.

* Private Correspondence.

Though, when I wrote the passage in question, I was not at all aware of any impropriety in it, and though I have frequently, since that time, both read and recollected it with the same approbation, I lately became uneasy upon the subject, and had no rest in my mind for three days, till I resolved to submit it to a trial at your tribunal, and to dispose of it ultimately according to your sentence. I am glad you have condemned it, and, though I do not feel as if I could presently supply its place, shall be willing to attempt the task, whatever labour it may cost me, and rejoice that it will not be in the power of the critics, whatever else they may charge me with, to accuse me of bigotry or a design to make a certain denomination of Christians odious, at the hazard of the public peace. I had rather my book were burnt than a single line of such a tendency should escape me.

We thank you for two copies of your Address to your Parishioners. The first I lent to Mr. Scott, whom I have not seen since I put it into his hands. You have managed your subject well; have applied yourself to despisers and absentees of every description, in terms so expressive of the interest you take in their welfare that the most wrongheaded person cannot be offended. We both wish it may have the effect you intend, and that, prejudices and groundless apprehensions being removed, the immediate objects of your ministry may make a more considerable part of your congregation.

Yours, my dear Sir, as ever,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

FRAGMENT.

Same date.

My dear Friend—A visit from Mr. Whitford shortened one of your letters to me; and now the cause has operated with the same effect upon one of mine to you. He is just gone, desired me to send his love, and talks of enclosing a letter to you in my next cover.

Literas tuas irato Sacerdoti scriptas, legi, perlegi, et ne verbum quidem mutandum censeo. Gratias tibi acturum si sapiat, existimo; sin alitèr eveniat, amici tamen officium præstitisti, et te coram te vindicâsti.

I have not written in Latin to shew my scholarship, nor to excite Mrs. Newton's curiosity, nor for any other wise reason whatever; but merely because, just at that moment, it came into my head to do so.

I never wrote a copy of Mary and John† in my

* Private Correspondence.

† NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

The lines alluded to are the following, which appeared afterwards, somewhat varied, in the Elegant Extracts in Verse:—

If John marries Mary, and Mary alone,
'Tis a very good match between Mary and John.
Should John wed a score, oh! the claws and the scratches!
It can't be a match: 'tis a bundle of matches.

life, except that which I sent to you. It was one of those bagatelles which sometimes spring up like mushrooms in my imagination, either while I am writing, or just before I begin. I sent it to you, because to you I send any thing that I think may raise a smile, but should never have thought of multiplying the impression. Neither did I ever repeat them to any one except Mrs. Unwin. The inference is fair and easy that you have some friend who has a good memory.

This afternoon the maid opened the parlour-door, and told us there was a lady in the kitchen. We desired she might be introduced, and prepared for the reception of Mrs. Jones. But it proved to be a lady unknown to us, and not Mrs. Jones. She walked directly up to Mrs. Unwin, and never drew back till their noses were almost in contact. It seemed as if she meant to salute her. An uncommon degree of familiarity, accompanied with an air of most extraordinary gravity, made me think her a little crazy. I was alarmed, and so was Mrs. Unwin. She had a bundle in her hand—a silk handkerchief tied up at the four corners. When I found she was not mad, I took her for a smuggler, and made no doubt but she had brought samples of contraband goods. But our surprise, considering the lady's appearance and deportment, was tenfold what it had been, when we found that it was Mary Philips's daughter, who had brought us a few apples by way of a specimen of a quantity she had for sale.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, Dec. 2, 1781.

My dear Friend—I thank you for the note. There is some advantage in having a tenant who is irregular in his payments: the longer the rent is withheld, the more considerable the sum when it arrives; to which we may add that its arrival, being unexpected, a circumstance that obtains always in a degree exactly in proportion to the badness of the tenant, is always sure to be the occasion of an agreeable surprise; a sensation that deserves to be ranked among the pleasantest that belong to us.

I gave two hundred and fifty pounds for the chambers. Mr. Ashurst's receipt, and the receipt of the person of whom he purchased, are both among my papers; and when wanted, as I suppose they will be in case of a sale, shall be forthcoming at your order.

The conquest of America seems to go on but slowly. Our ill success in that quarter will oblige me to suppress two pieces that I was rather proud of. They were written two or three years ago; not long after the double repulse sustained by Mr. D'Estaing at Lucia and at Savannah, and when our operations in the western world wore a more promising aspect. Presuming upon such promises, that I might venture to prophesy an illustrious consummation of the war, I did so. But my predic-

* Private Correspondence.

tions proving false, the verse in which they were expressed must perish with them.

Yours, my dear Sir,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Dec. 4, 1781.

My dear Friend—The present to the queen of France, and the piece addressed to Sir Joshua Reynolds, my only two political efforts, being of the predictive kind, and both falsified, or likely to be so by the miscarriage of the royal cause in America, were already condemned when I received your last.† I have a poetical epistle which I wrote

* Private Correspondence.

† As the reader may wish to see the lines to Sir Joshua, they are here supplied from the documents left by Dr. Johnson. Those to the Queen of France are not found.

TO SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS.

Dear President, whose art sublime
Gives perpetuity to time,
And bids transactions of a day,
That fleeting hours would waft away
To dark futurity, survive,
And in unfading beauty live,—
You cannot with a grace decline
A special mandate of the Nine—
Yourself, whatever task you choose,
So much indebted to the Muse.

Thus says the Sisterhood:—We come—
Fix well your pallet on your thumb,

last summer, and another poem not yet finished, in stanzas, with which I mean to supply their places. Henceforth I have done with politics. The stage of national affairs is such a fluctuating scene that

Prepare the pencil and the tints—
We come to furnish you with hints.
French disappointment, British glory,
Must be the subject of my story.

First strike a curve, a graceful bow,
Then slope it to a point below ;
Your outline easy, airy, light,
Fill'd up, becomes a paper kite.
Let independence, sanguine, horrid,
Blaze like a meteor on the forehead :
Beneath (but lay aside your graces)
Draw *six-and-twenty rueful faces*,
Each with a staring, steadfast eye,
Fix'd on his great and good ally.
France flies the kite—'tis on the wing—
Britannia's lightning cuts the string.
The wind that raised it, ere it ceases,
Just rends it into thirteen pieces,
Takes charge of every flutt'ring sheet,
And lays them all at George's feet.

Iberia, trembling from afar,
Renounces the confed'rate war.
Her efforts and her arts o'ercome,
France calls her shatter'd navies home :
Repenting Holland learns to mourn
The sacred treaties she has torn ;
Astonishment and awe profound
Are stamp'd upon the nations round ;
Without one friend, above all foes,
Britannia gives the world repose.

an event which appears probable to-day becomes impossible to-morrow; and unless a man were indeed a prophet, he cannot, but with the greatest hazard of losing his labour, bestow his rhymes upon future contingencies, which perhaps are never to take place but in his own wishes and in the reveries of his own fancy. I learned when I was a boy, being the son of a staunch Whig, and a man that loved his country, to glow with that patriotic enthusiasm which is apt to break forth into poetry, or at least to prompt a person, if he has any inclination that way, to poetical endeavours. Prior's pieces of that sort were recommended to my particular notice; and, as that part of the present century was a season when clubs of a political character, and consequently political songs, were much in fashion, the best in that style, some written by Rowe, and I think some by Congreve, and many by other wits of the day, were proposed to my admiration. Being grown up, I became desirous of imitating such bright examples, and while I lived in the Temple produced several halfpenny ballads, two or three of which had the honour to be popular. What we learn in childhood we retain long; and the successes we met with about three years ago, when D'Estaing was twice repulsed, once in America and once in the West Indies, having set fire to my patriotic zeal once more, it discovered itself by the same symptoms, and produced effects much like those it had produced before. But, unhappily, the ardour I felt upon the occasion, disdaining to be confined within

the bounds of fact, pushed me upon uniting the prophetical with the poetical character, and defeated its own purpose.—I am glad it did. The less there is of that sort in my book the better; it will be more consonant to your character, who patronize the volume, and, indeed, to the constant tenor of my own thoughts upon public matters, that I should exhort my countrymen to repentance, than that I should flatter their pride—that vice for which, perhaps, they are even now so severely punished.

We are glad, for Mr. Barham's sake, that he has been so happily disappointed. How little does the world suspect what passes in it every day!—that true religion is working the same wonders now as in the first ages of the church—that parents surrender up their children into the hands of God, to die at his own appointed moment, and by what death he pleases, without a murmur, and receive them again as if by a resurrection from the dead! The world, however, would be more justly chargeable with wilful blindness than it is, if all professors of the truth exemplified its power in their conduct as conspicuously as Mr. Barham.

Easterly winds and a state of confinement within our own walls suit neither me nor Mrs. Unwin; though we are both, to use the Irish term, rather unwell than ill.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

Mrs. Madan is happy.—She will be found ripe, fall when she may.

We are sorry you speak doubtfully about a spring visit to Olney. Those doubts must not outlive the winter.

W. C.

We now conclude this portion of our work. The incidents recorded in it cannot fail to excite interest, and to awaken a variety of reflections. Remarks of this kind will, however, appear more suitable, when all the details of the Poet's singular history are brought to a close, and presented in a connected series. In the mean time we cannot but admire that divine wisdom and mercy, which often so remarkably overrules the darkest dispensations—

From seeming evil still educing good.

It might have been anticipated that the morbid temperament of Cowper would either have unfitted him for intellectual exertion, or that his productions would have been tinged with all the colours of a distempered mind: but such was not the case. Whether he composed in poetry or prose, the effect upon his mind seems to have been similar to the influence of the harp of David over the spirit of Saul. The inward struggles of the soul yielded to the magic power of song; and the inimitable letter-writer forgot his sorrows in the sallies of his own sportive imagination. The peculiarity of his temperament, so far from restraining his powers, seems

from his own account to have quickened them into action. "I write," he says, in one of his letters, "to amuse and forget myself; and yet always with the desire of benefiting others." His object in writing was twofold, and so was his success; for he wrote and forgot himself; and yet wrote in such a manner, as never to be forgotten by others.

NOTES TO VOLUME THE FIRST.

Page 43.

"If they really interest themselves in my welfare."—Cowper's pecuniary resources had been seriously impaired by his loss of the Clerkship of the Journals in the House of Lords, and by his subsequent resignation of the office of Commissioner of Bankrupts. At the kind instigation of Major Cowper, his friends had been induced to unite in rendering his income more adequate to his necessary annual expenditure.

Page 62.

"Rousseau's description of an English Morn." See his Emilius.

Page 64.

"To read Law Lectures to the students of Lyon's Inn." The office of readership to this Society had been offered to Cowper, but was declined by him.

Page 84.

"Marshall" on Sanctification. This book is distinguished by profound and enlarged views of the subject on which it treats. It was strongly recommended by the pious Harvey, whose testimony to its merits is prefixed to the work.

Page 91.

"Our friends Haweis, Dr. Conyears, and Mr. Newton."

Dr. Haweis was a leading character in the religious world at this time, and subsequently the superintendent of Lady Huntingdon's chapels, and of the Seminary for Students founded by that lady. His principal works are a "Commentary on the Bible," and "History of the Church."

Dr. Conyears.—The circumstances attending the death of this truly pious and eminent servant of God are too affecting not to be deemed worthy of being recorded. He had ascended the pulpit of St. Paul's, Deptford, of which he was Rector, and had just delivered his text, "Ye shall see my face no more," when he was seized with a sudden fainting, and fell back in his pulpit; he recovered, however, sufficiently to proceed with his sermon, and to give the concluding blessing, when he again fainted away, was carried home, and expired without a groan, in the sixty-second year of his age, 1786. The affecting manner of his death is thus happily adverted to in the following beautiful lines.

Sent by their Lord on purposes of grace,
Thus angels do his will, and see his face;
With outspread wings they stand, prepar'd to soar,
Declare their message, and are seen no more.

Underneath is a Latin inscription, of which the following is the translation.

I have sinned
I repented. I believed.
I have loved. I rest.
I shall rise again.
And by the grace of Christ,
However unworthy,
I shall reign.

Pages 114 *to* 117.

LETTERS TO MR. HILL

It is impossible to read these Letters of Cowper to Mr. Hill, as well as a preceding one in page 95, and not to remark their altered tone and diminished cordiality of feeling. The forgetfulness of former ties and pursuits is often, we know, made a subject of reproach against religious characters. How then is Cowper to be vindicated? Does religion pervert the feelings? We believe, on the contrary, that it purifies and exalts them; but it changes their current, and fixes them on higher and nobler objects. Cowper's mind, it must be remembered, had experienced a great moral revolution, which had imparted a new and powerful impression to his views and principles. In this state of things Mr. Hill (lamenting possibly the change) solicits his return to London, and to his former habits and as-

sociations. But the relish for these enjoyments was gone; they had lost their power to charm and captivate. "I am now more than ever," says Cowper, "unwilling to revisit those noisy and crowded scenes, which I never loved, and which I now abhor; the incidents of my life have given an entire new turn to my whole character and conduct, and rendered me incapable of receiving pleasure from the same employments and amusements of which I could readily partake in former days." (See page 98.) Hill reiterates the invitation, and Cowper his refusal. Thus one party was advancing in spirituality, while the other remained stationary. The bond was therefore necessarily weakened, because identity of feeling must ever constitute the basis of all human friendships and intercourse; and the mind that has received a heavenly impulse cannot return with its former ardour to the pursuit of earthly objects. It cannot ascend and descend at the same moment. Such, however, was the real worth and honesty of Mr. Hill, that their friendship still survived, and a memorial of it is recorded in lines familiar to every reader of Cowper.

> "An honest man, close button'd to the chin,
> Broad-cloth without, and a warm heart within."
>
> Vol. vii. page 137.

Page 125.

"Brydone," author of Travels in Sicily and Malta. They are written with much interest, but he indulges in remarks on the subject of Mount Etna which rather militate against the Mosaic account of the creation.

Page 127.

" A detail of intrigues carried on by the Company and their servants." Cowper here alludes to the celebrated work of the Abbé Raynal, entitled " Philosophical and Political History of the Establishments and Commerce of Europeans in the two Indies." This book created a very powerful sensation, being written with great freedom of sentiment and boldness of remark, conveyed in an eloquent though rather declamatory style. Such was the alarm excited in France by this publication, that a decree passed the Parliament of Paris, by which the work was ordered to be burnt.

Page 170.

The London Riots, June, 1780.

Cowper alludes to this afflicting page in our domestic history, in his Table Talk, vol. vi.

> When tumult lately burst his prison door,
> And set plebeian thousands in a roar;
> When he usurp'd authority's just place,
> And dared to look his master in the face.
> When the rude rabble's watch-word was—Destroy,
> And blazing London seem'd a second Troy.

Page 171.

" The news of a great acquisition in America," &c. The surrender of Charles-Town, in South Carolina, to Admiral Arbuthnot, and General Sir Henry Clinton.

Page 179.

" Care, vale! sed non æternùm, care, valeto!"

We subjoin the beautiful verses of Bishop Louth on the death of a beloved daughter, which seem to have suggested some hints, in the composition of the above epitaph to Northcote.

Cara, Vale, ingenio præstans, pietate, pudore,
Et plus quam natæ nomine cara, vale.
Cara Maria, vale: at veniet felicius ævum,
Quando iterum tecum, sim modo dignus, ero.
Cara redi, lætâ tum dicam voce, paternos
Eja age in amplexus, cara Maria, redi.

Page 183.

" Dryden's illustrious epitaph on Milton."

Three poets, in three distant ages born,
Greece, Italy, and England did adorn.
The first in loftiness of thought surpass'd;
The next in majesty, in both the last.
The force of Nature could no farther go,
To make a third she join'd the other two.

Page 252.

Vincent Bourne. " I think him a better Latin poet than Tibullus, Propertius," &c. &c.

The classic beauty and felicity of expression in the Latin compositions of Bourne have been justly admired; but a doubt will exist in the mind of the classical reader, whether the praise which exalts his merits above those of a Tibullus, to whom both Ovid and Horace have borne so distinguished a testimony, does not exceed the bounds of legitimate eulogy.

Page 297.

" The witty and elegant Hawkins Browne," author of the popular Poem, " De Animi Immortalitate," written in the style of Lucretius. The humorous poem alluded to by Cowper, in praise of smoking, is entitled " The Pipe of Tobacco." It is remarkable as exhibiting a happy imitation of the style of six different authors--Cibber, Ambrose Philips, Thomson, Pope, Swift, and Young. The singularity and talent discoverable in this production procured for it much celebrity. An edition of his Poems was published by his son, Isaac Hawkins Browne, Esq.

Page 316.

" The excellent Caraccioli." Marquis Caraccioli, born at Paris, 1723. It is now well known that the Letters of Pope Ganganelli, though passing under the name of that pontiff, were composed by this writer. These letters, as well as all his writings, are distinguished by a sweet strain of moral feeling, that powerfully awakens the best emotions of the heart; but there is a want of more evangelical light. He is also the author of " La Jouissance de soi-même;" " La Conversation avec soi-même;" " La Grandeur d'Ame," &c.; and of " The Life of Madame de Maintenon."

Page 325.

" This unwelcome intelligence from America." The surrender of the army of Lord Cornwallis to

the combined forces of America and France, Oct. 18th, 1781. It is remarkable that this event occurred precisely four years after the surrender of General Burgoyne, at Saratoga, in the same month, and almost on the same day. This disastrous occurrence decided the fate of the American war, which cost Great Britain an expenditure of one hundred and twenty millions, and drained it of its best blood, and exhausted its vital resources.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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